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It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity

Developing a practice-based method
for cultural history curation and dissemination

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ABSTRACT

This research contributes new knowledge about the curation and presentation of cultural history. I tested relationships between curation and performance through the development of an interdisciplinary approach to capturing, storing and sharing the histories of subcultures or scenes, and the creation of a public performance centred around the Brisbane punk and post-punk music scene. The project contributes new understanding of how public stories about popular culture can be presented while simultaneously generating new knowledge about the culture itself.

KEYWORDS

Brisbane, punk, curation, performance

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

"What was directly lived reappears frozen in the distance, inscribed in the fashions and illusions of an era carried away with it"

(Debord 1959).

This is the exegetic component of a project that began in 2010 with a request to deliver a keynote address at a conference in Sydney. The content of that address was a take on the Brisbane underground music scene of the late 70s, then the subject of my doctoral research. Brisbane isn't famous for much. It's not a place that often figures in any kind of global view. But it occasionally does register as a blip, and one of those was a trigger for the cascade of cultural phenomena that are the main ingredient of *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity*. The Saints recorded "(I'm) Stranded" in June 1976 in Brisbane, beating the Sex Pistols into the studio by 5 months. Even though they were never a punk band and never pretended to be, they were forever tied to the wave that swept through youth culture in the 70s. Their success, followed by the critical acclaim afforded the Go-Betweens, and the wave of the punk movement itself, generated a substantial literature mostly focussed on the moderate triumphs of a handful of bands.

My intention was to challenge this received history of the Brisbane punk and post-punk music scene by using lived experience, and to add to this history using the aesthetics and mood of those times, and the stories of people who made the scene but whose contributions have gone largely undocumented. Across the years that followed, I devised a number of public presentations that explored ways of presenting this history and from this making, a question emerged:

What can live performance contribute to the curation of cultural history?

I was born in 1957, so the period of cultural change being discussed here sits squarely in my early 20s. Since 1978, I have been playing in bands in both Brisbane and Sydney – music-making plays an elemental role in my life. As a musician, I am a guitar player, a bass player, a writer and (terrible) singer, an arranger and producer. The band I joined in 1978, Zero, evolved into an entity which was central to the Brisbane underground music scene before dissipating in 1984, and has often been cited and highlighted in histories and compiled archives of the Brisbane/Australian underground and electronic music scenes. Through the 1980s, based on skills developed in the late 70s, I also made some part of my living being a graphic artist in the music and film industries. Within the trove of ephemera from Brisbane's music scene, my graphic work appears in posters, handbills and many other related items. In late 1987 I was invited into The Go-Betweens, one of the bands that defines Australian popular music in the 20th century. In 1996, I shifted direction, and after graduating from the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, embarked on a 15-year career as a sound editor and screen composer, playing a key creative role in over 90 projects - feature films, documentaries, installations, television and short films; and winning a number of national and international awards for my work.

This working life as a musician and filmmaker elbowed its way to the front of the research. It became a filter through which I made research decisions. Storytelling is at the centre of both crafts, and for more than 40 years I had been an embellisher: the stories don't often start with me, but finishing them is my trade. A narrative core, an awareness of flow and dynamics, and the inclusion of audience: these have all been central to my practice, and they continued to underpin this current work. Because my story-making skills were focussed on this project, they moulded the content, look, sound, style and feel, and the methods of presenting history.

Ephemera of all kinds are essential to stories like this. To tease apart a social scene in the late 20th century means to open a Pandora's box from the final frontier of analogue culture. Paper, vinyl, film, cassettes and photographs were the storage media of the times. People gathered these things to themselves as ways of proving connection, of embodying memory and of developing identity. It was obvious from the start of the research that this story could be told in a more holistic way using this material - these images and sounds. The stories

flowed when these media were woven in, real emotions lurched into the frame and, most importantly, audiences responded well to them.[1]

The keynote in 2010 had an epilogue:

> I want my final thesis to be like this, this thing you've just seen. I'd like to take what I've learned about pictures and sound and music as story-telling devices over the last 35 years to enable and inform this presentation and its offspring, whatever they look like . . . I have strong feelings about this place, this time, this river, these people. I want to put them somewhere while it still makes sense, before the tapes shed their oxide and the films decompose, before the livers start to collapse and the memories go with them.
>
> (Willsteed 2010)

The decision to deliver *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* as a performance rather than a conventional text fulfilled these desires and expectations. But it also challenged my thinking about the object of this research. It led me to a new way of presenting the story of a sub-culture, and new thinking about how performance might become a curatorial device. It led to new knowledge, developed through practice, about the nexus of curation and performance. It is from here that I made informed decisions about what to use and how to use it, what to say and how to say it, as the presentations developed over time. And it is in this space that the theoretical core of this exegesis lives. It is where past and present mingle, where music is made and re-made, and where multiple modes of practice feed from one another to create something unique and affecting. The practice, the performance, became a model for telling history that can be used by artists/historians as a form of cultural curation for multiple sub-cultures.

[1] See Appendices 2a and 2b

CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

From its inception *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* had, at its core, a sense of righteous indignation. The recorded histories of this scene persist with a view that favours the musical over the social; the successful over the forgotten. It was my intention from the very beginning, galvanised by seeing the photographs of Paul O'Brien,[2] to try and tell a different kind of story. I had some tacit understanding of how that might be done but needed clarity to progress. The project was becoming an exploration into what might be appropriate methods for telling the story, given my background, skills and interests. Here, then, lies the theoretical landscape in which the creative work was devised and constructed.

MUSEOLOGY AND CURATORIAL PRACTICE

Curation studies are drawn from the broader field of museology[3] (Desvallées and Mairesse 2010) (Obrist, Bovier and Theiler 2008) (McCall and Gray 2014). Any curatorial practice, like this project, implies an involvement with all the branches of museology: acquisition, preservation and communication. Objects are *acquired*, gathered into *collections*. *Research* is conducted and findings are *communicated* (Desvallées and Mairesse 2010). There are other aspects of the curatorial craft, but this arc of acquisition, mediation, and exhibition was an apt model to apply to my problem: how to re-imagine and re-tell the story of the Brisbane punk scene in the 1970s/80s. This exegesis elaborates my engagement with a number of relevant aspects of curatorial theory, drawing attention to the role of social media in the acquisition and cataloguing of ephemeral material, and the role of the situated artist as a curatorial force in the telling of cultural history.

[2] Paul O'Brien's 880 photographs of Brisbane punk gigs (1978-1980) were donated to the State Library in 2014. Apart from some exposure on Facebook, they had been unknown to the scene.
[3] Museology might best be defined as "the entirety of theoretical and critical thinking within the museum field" (Desvallées 2010, 55)

Traditionally, the museum as institution tended “to privilege both its collections-based function and its social links to the cultural tastes of particular social groups” (McCall and Gray 2014, 20). Those ideas, and the structures that had been teetering around them, were dismantled through the 80s and 90s by a “shift in focus from objects to ideas (and) . . . an awareness of social accountability and social (as well as moral) responsibility” (McCall and Gray 2014, 21). Thinking changed and practices followed, as the “the articulation between the real and the virtual, the physical and the symbolic [heralded a] renewal of cultural communication in the world” (Castells 2010, 427). At the turn of the century, a wave of information technology rolled through the institutional world; walls turning to mist; and once static memory objects floating untethered in the ether (Paul O’Brien’s photographs, once they appeared on Facebook, being a poignant example).

Curatorial practice is at the heart of this renewal, but there is “chronic uncertainty surrounding the function of curating” (Charlesworth 2006, 3). The role of curator in the broader, institutional context is a shifting one, whose definitions and meanings are much contested. As I eased into this role, I grappled with the idea that although “devices and techniques of exhibition design . . . provide context for the visitor, yet each also distances the viewer from the art or artefact by predetermining its cultural value” (Casey 2003, 3). The conflict was tempered by an underlying certainty: regardless of how the institutions or other mediators saw this particular slice of place/time, I was following an implicit, long-held understanding that I have a very real and valuable connection to this material - the sounds, the artefacts, the stories. This tangible connection allows me to support the material, in the language of the archivist, as being both *authentic* and *reliable*: things are what they say they are, and there is a clear chain of custody (Lee 2005). The provenance of these artefacts, these things, is written into my life, wound around me, bound to me. Such subjectivity is at odds with the traditional notion of the curator as dispassionate and objective, but it frames the curation as the work of an “active societal agent” (Milevska 2013, 69), and underscores the complexity of modern curatorial practice. My history allows me the ability to reach beyond disciplinary interpretation. It allows me to exploit the polysemic nature of the many parts of this story; their “intrinsic plurality of meaning” (Cameron 2010, 84).

As this project began to grow, my experience in the media suggested that the telling needed more than words on paper. I found it difficult to merely talk about that time, the people, and

the things that they made, without the evocative, inclusive act: the audience had to see the artefacts and hear the songs. So this last aspect of the museological arc, the *communication,* or the sharing of the story, became transformed by my life as a performer, and moved from one theoretical school into another.

PERFORMANCE STUDIES

In discussing the theatrical aspects of this work I am reaching into the realm of performance[4] studies that deals with personal narrative. I chose to use my life and my experiences as a way of sharing the story of a scene, a time and a place. Testing the idea that "personal narrative as performance requires theory which takes context as seriously as it does text . . ." (Langellier 1999, 128), I situated the story of this time squarely within the story of my life.

By choosing performance as a mode of delivery, I was following in a long tradition of storytellers. The decision to abandon the text as a singular voice was made early, in response to audience reaction to the first airing of the bones of the story, fleshed out by the films and images and sounds, and wrapped in the skin of my voice. "Performances are not read; rather, they are *experienced* . . . which may involve a host of emotional and psychological responses, not just 'intellectual' ones" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2013, 344). This notion closely aligned with my own feelings about the choice to perform the history rather than write about it. Performance studies then guided the various iterations of this project up to its public showing in October 2015 by helping to fulfil the potential in the work; by helping bring it "to much broader audiences, breaking down social class and other barriers, and doing so in a way in which . . . the audience and researcher engage in a complex exchange through which multidimensional meanings emerge" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2013, 344).

In the following chapter, I will explore in more detail the literature surrounding my twin areas of interest. I want to hold these theoretical maps - curation and performance - up to

[4] Performance is used here in a theatrical, narrative context, rather than the dialogic or fine art contexts. See Greg Dening's *The Theatricality of History Making and the Paradoxes of Acting*, 1993.

the sun; to overlap the edges, the outlying suburbs, and create an intersection of shared interest and influence. As a traveller, I need to know the language of the people who live and work in this place; to read their writings and learn their songs. And I also need to be a keen student of those who have tried to tell this story before me. How had people approached this period, and others like it, in the past? What styles and methods did they use to explore, and share, what are unique and idiosyncratic scenes?

CHAPTER 3 – CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

CULTURAL HISTORY

Matthew Arnold captured 19th century thinking in defining culture as, broadly, a "pursuit of total perfection . . .[capturing] . . . the best which has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold 1869, 190). This was a pervasive and influential view in Victorian England, and one which drew attention to the differences between ethnic and social groups, and the favouring of high art over the everyday, where culture lived in the manor house rather than in the village. It was Arnold who left us with the 'barbarian' and the 'philistine' - middle classes desperately aspiring for the "sweetness and light" (Arnold 1869, 79) of (European) culture. This exclusivity flavoured cultural histories through the turn of the century but was finally tempered by powerful, political artists like William Morris and his Utopian vision, with the working, or 'useful', classes as the "only possible elements of a true society" (Morris 1903, 10). Morris' work interlaced with the more modern and scientific social historians , and the emphasis on the individual and the lofty gave over to stories coloured by the influence of society, of geography, of anthropology and psychology (Forth 2001).

In the 1950s, Raymond Williams took Arnold and Morris, and began to help define what would become 'new cultural history', where culture, rather than a product of class, is really a living agent that binds classes or generations or social groups together, and makes sense of our world. He called it a "*structure of feeling* . . . as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible part of our activities" (Williams 1961, 64). Clifford Geertz similarly described culture as "webs of significance" and the study of culture to be one of interpretation and the making of meaning (Geertz 1973, 5). There was an emphasis on context – place, community, gender, the broad history of the times – as significant lenses for viewing culture and cultural artefacts.

This turn in cultural thinking naturally played out in the histories of culture. But one element remains striking: these scholarly approaches were overwhelmingly textual – a stunning river of words. I could continue here, to spread into the cultural philosophies that flourished through the 80s, but my focus is narrow, and I take a shady tributary to examine how people have approached small scenes in small towns like mine.

SUB-CULTURAL HISTORY

"I shall begin with a proposition . . . youth is present only when it is a problem" - these words open the first chapter of Dick Hebdige's *Hiding In The Light: On Images and Things*, (Hebdige 1988, 17) and they are without a doubt true when considering Brisbane and its music scene in the late 70s.

Hebdige, a graduate of the Birmingham University Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, wrote *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* in 1978, in the after-effects of the punk fuse which lit fires from Bristol to Brisbane. This book remains a Rosetta Stone to some extent, a way of entering the many schools of thought which informed subcultural studies at its inception. It was criticized for being too British, too punk, too reggae, too continental (!) (Adler 1981, 1458), but it's influence lingers.

The post-subculturalists, led by Steve Redhead (1990) and later, Sarah Thornton (1995) took a critical approach to this prevailing, fairly neat, sociological or class-based theory of subcultures, and proposed that "youth identities . . . had become more reflexive, fluid and fragmented due to an increasing flow of cultural commodities, images and texts" (Bennett 2011, 493). Andy Bennett applied this thinking to extensive research in the dance music scene in Newcastle (UK) in the 90s and arrived at a 'neo-tribalist' alternative. In revisiting this theory - this subcultural turn - a decade later, he found subcultural and post-subcultural thinking to be almost discreet schools, one based in class/gender/race, the other in cultural consumption.

While *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* is focused on one specific sub-culture and the stories it engenders, this is not sub-cultural studies as I have just described. Rather, it extends these studies to examine how musical subcultural history can be curated through

performance. There have been, though, a number of written works that have set the tone for our expectations of how a music history might appear.

MUSIC HISTORY

The history of popular music up until the 1980s largely avoided the personal. In 1982, in an academic landscape flooded with cultural theory, Sara Cohen shared Simon Frith's view that "we still don't know much about *how* musicians make their musical choices, how they define their social role, how they handle its contradictions" (Cohen 1991, 127). His point was made in the context of widely used data, drawn from journalism or statistics, that was "notoriously unreliable" (Cohen 1991, 126). Frith became the standard bearer for a new approach to thinking about popular music, one which was broadly sociological. He is, in his own words, "engaged with the problems of taking popular music seriously" (Frith 2012). His work, starting with *The Sociology of Rock* in 1978, and prolific through the ensuing decades, explores many topics: the tension between the industry and consumers, how meaning is imbued by consumers, suburban/city cultural relationship, genres and cultures, and cultural identity.

Both Ruth Finnegan's *The Hidden Musicians* and Sara Cohen's *Rock Culture in Liverpool* are central in the study of music scenes. Finnegan's book is the story of the amateur musicians of Milton Keynes. She found local music making to be "an active collective practice, rather than just passive mass-controlled consumption or solitary contemplation" (Finnegan 1989, 297) - a concept which is antidotal to the policy-makers' obsession with industry/consumer-centric research. Her work revealed that this practice was "relevant for central questions about life in urban industrial society" (Finnegan 1989, 297). She develops the concept of 'pathways' to describe the complex nature of people engaging with music practice. She sees them as "stretching out and criss-crossing through the town" (Finnegan 1989, 317). They crossed distance, time, generations within families, concepts of class and culture and community. People intersected with them at different times in their lives, in different circumstances. Most importantly, these pathways are not abstract concepts: they are constructed from and supported by active music practice.

Finnegan's work was followed in the early 90s by Sara Cohen's *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making* (Cohen 1991). It is a pivotal document. Cohen's immersion into the Liverpool inner-city post-punk scene allowed her to develop invaluable insights into the social and creative workings of two closely related bands. She "tries to take it all in, the financing, the playing, the band arguments, who makes decisions, how a rehearsal is run, how the music business is run, what the music means" (Kogan 1992, 252). Her work is anthropological, detailed and insightful

Cohen has a keen awareness of the siting of her characters in the map of the city. Geography, the layout of the town, is also the key to the opening of Barry Shank's *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. Readers are taken on a stroll, south from the University down Congress Avenue, past the Capitol and across the Colorado River, back through time to the 70s and 80s to watch Austin's music culture shift and change with the tides of influence. Shank sees his role as a tension between the immersed observer and the writer, and hopes to "achieve a dialectic of distance and intimacy, subject and object, generality and particularity, description and object described" (Shank 1994, xii). This aligns with the contradictory nature of my own relationship with the Brisbane underground music scene in the late 70s and my role in this research.

Austin's shift from being the home of progressive country music to the home of SXSW, the largest music, film and media festival in the US, is a remarkable story. In some significant ways, there are echoes of Austin in Brisbane. Texas and Queensland are large, mostly flat, rich in resources, sparse in population, and with a fondness for guns, Christianity and conservatism. When Brisbane City Council and the Queensland State Government hatched a plan to invigorate the popular musical life in the city, with the establishment of QMusic in 1994, the first BIGSOUND music conference and the Valley Music Harmony Plan in 2002, the parallels with SXSW and Austin's re-invigoration were obvious. Brisbane was staking a claim as a music town, and it backed this claim, in part, on its music history.

‘MAINSTREAM’ BRISBANE MUSIC HISTORY

The most well-known publication about Brisbane music is Andrew Stafford’s *Pig City: From The Saints To Savage Garden* (Stafford 2004). The first half of the book is concerned with the confluence of popular culture (represented by the emergent music scene) and politics that was peculiar to Brisbane in the 70s and 80s. This very readable social history reveals the power wielded by the Queensland Police: a power gifted by the then Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen who either supported or blithely ignored its abuse. It sketches clearly the mood and events of the late 60s and early 70s that gave rise to the birth of 4ZZZ, a community radio station without equal in Australian media history. With the existence of 4ZZZ the vitality of the Brisbane music scene during these two decades was assured.

Twenty years earlier, Clinton Walker had documented Australia’s nascent punk/post-punk scene in *Inner City Sound* (Walker 1982). Walker’s definitive gathering of interviews and opinion from fanzines like *Pulp* and *Roadrunner* was intended to “expose those bands which have missed the mainstream” (Walker 1982). It succeeds beautifully, and its relevance was guaranteed by the youthful voices of both musicians and journalists alike, and by its stylish DIY visual aesthetic in the design by Marjorie Macintosh. Walker followed this with *The Next Thing* (Walker 1985), *Stranded* (Walker 1996) and *Buried Country* (Walker 2000) as well as a number of written forays into broader popular culture.

David Nichols’ *The Go-Betweens* (Nichols 2006) is a substantial historical work about a critically acclaimed but commercially unsuccessful band that left Brisbane in 1981 and returned in the 1990s. There is a bridge that straddles the Brisbane River named after them. The book explores the relationships and personalities that made the band, and spends a number of chapters in the Brisbane in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I appear as an entertaining bit player. As I write this, Go-Betweens principal Robert Forster is on television promoting his recent release, *Grant and I: Inside and Outside The Go-Betweens* (Forster 2016), a memoir of the relationship between the band’s songwriters. It is an evocative and fond telling of a personal story, framed by the tale of a rock band travelling the world through the last decades of the 20th century.

Apart from Forster's book, these works examine Brisbane music and musicians through the lens of the journalist, the academic, the fan - and I have always found them somewhat lacking. There seemed to be little evidence of what loomed large in my memory: the purely social nature of the scene, the complex intertwining of lives, the strength of desire to just make music for its own sake. How funny it all was!! The irony of my subversive band playing in King George Square in the centre of the city, in front of City Hall. The screenwriter and satirist Jules Feiffer said it best, in a line from *Little Murders*: "There's a fox loose in the chicken coop!"(Arkin 1971).

A better fit was *Know Your Product*, a powerful, evocative exhibition at Brisbane's Institute of Modern Art in the spring of 1986 - ten years after The Saints' Chris Bailey's chubby sneer convinced us that we should leave him alone. Ross Harley curated a room full of memory: vinyl, photographs, posters, magazines; sounds, stories and music from a time whose ink was barely dry. He made it possible for bands to play that hadn't played for years; for a double-handful of radio documentaries to be produced with wide-ranging points of view; for screenings of video and Super 8 films that had only ever seen the darkness of night in lounge-rooms, church-hall gigs, and shop-front galleries. The gathering of all these material traces gave substance to what Harley called "the practice of protest in the state of oppression" (Harley 1986, 26). The oppressor, Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, would not be voted out for another three years.

Although Harley's show signalled a level of sophistication - a mature appraisal of popular culture - its installation at the IMA was telling. This gallery, opened in 1975, was very much at odds with the prevailing culture in Brisbane through its first twenty years. It was a home for experimental, conceptual and, most importantly, local art. There was a perceived "gap between the restricted contemporary showings at the QAG [Queensland Art Gallery] and the obvious commercial constraints that limited the efforts of the local dealer galleries, which the proposed Institute was intended to fill" (Anderson 1989). But even though it seems appropriate that a show like this was a good fit for the IMA, it was not all smooth sailing for Harley:

> I'm sure there were many who collected, made or in some way participated in the DIY punk ethos who thought it was complete bollocks to put this stuff in a museum. I

> mean, isn't the museum exactly the kind of pompous cultural institution punk came to demolish? And vice-versa: I know there were many who thought that posters, cassettes, Super 8 films, photocopied fanzines and all the rest of it had no place in the artworld. I actually remember being in a forum at the IMA and being asked to define 'Art' and then to explain why the work I was interested in should be considered, let alone exhibited, in this context.
>
> (Harley 2007)

Development and progress, measured by cranes on the horizon rather than galleries or venues, were also seen as the indicator of Brisbane's cultural worth. The building of Queensland Performing Arts Centre in 1985, married to the re-location of the State Library and Museum to the city's Southbank, was an attempt to give Brisbane some legitimacy as a city aware of the finer things in life, but people who looked different continued to be harassed by the police, venues and heritage buildings continued to be destroyed, and in 1988 the University of Queensland forcibly ejected 4ZZZ from the St. Lucia campus.[5]

But over the turn of the century the attitude of the large institutions started to change. Christopher Smith at the Queensland Performing Arts Gallery curated an exhibition based around a short-lived but vital Brisbane punk band. *Young, Fast and Non-Boring* was staged in 2005, and did well to capture this "particular moment in Queensland's musical history" (Davis 2005) when the sub-culture ran headfirst into the prevailing culture: RAZAR at Cloudland Ballroom.

Taking To The Streets was a vibrant and compelling exhibition staged at the Museum of Brisbane in the winter of 2006. The show shared stories of protest and subversion in the Brisbane of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was curated by Jo Besley, Louise Denoon, and Katie McConnell, and expanded by a collective group of historians and interested parties in an "intense, colourful, teeming compilation of posters, badges, t-shirts, costumes, images, handbills, magazines, stickers, interviews, stories, voices and music that sprawled across two large gallery spaces and engaged audiences for five months" (Besley, Denoon and

[5] After being on campus since its first broadcast in December 1975, on 14 December 1988, 4ZZZ was taken off air and forcibly evicted from its University of Queensland premises by the then conservative student union executive. It eventually found a home in the former Communist Party of Australia headquarters in Fortitude Valley. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4ZZZ#History)

McConnel 2007, 1). There were aspects of this protest culture that were overtly musical, in that bands played fundraisers and rallies; got arrested in street marches; and wrote, recorded, and performed political songs. Another layer of context was delivered in 2008 at the IMA, in the form of David Pestorius' *The Brisbane Sound*. An echo of Harley's show arriving 22 years later, there were once again images on the walls, photos and fanzines, live bands and Super 8s - though with less bulk. The written aspects of *The Brisbane Sound* were quite substantial, but remain unpublished.

Opening in May 2013 in the State Library of Queensland, *Live!* was a multi-room exhibition featuring curated live bands, public talks, the detritus of rock: posters, vinyl, t-shirts, and an absorbing six-screen installation, exploring the music of Queensland in the 20th century. Starting with the marching bands of the first world war and encompassing "the influence of American soldiers on jazz during World War 2, to the rise of punk in the 1970s and 80s, and the international emergence of Queensland bands toward the end of the twentieth century" (State Library of Queensland 2013), it was a successful show and made good use of the spaces in the library. It was, by necessity, quite broad in its scope.

In 2016, Peter Anderson opened his *Ephemeral Traces* exhibition at the University of Queensland Art Museum as a "comprehensive analysis of artist-run practice in Brisbane during the final decade of the conservative Joh Bjelke-Petersen government" (Anderson 2016). Although tangential to the music scene, there were many points of contact across performances, space-sharing and publication. *Ephemeral Traces* was being developed and exhibited at the same time as the research and release of Paul Andrew's *ARI Remix - Artist-Run Culture*, an 'open source, public archive' whose first newsletter, *#1 The Scene* (Andrew 2016), is an 84-page vibrant spread of historical richness and contemporary interviews and comments. Edited and designed by Brian Doherty and Jane Richens, it entwines the past and the present with great style.

All of these readings of the cultural history of our town had much to be said for them. My take on this history was through a slightly different lens: the refracted view of emotional and social memory. I wanted to capture my memory of the *spirit* of what it was like to grow up in Brisbane through these years, with an emphasis on the *personal* rather than the academic, and on the liminal rather than the 'famous'. Like the other shows, there was an emphasis on

the curation of the ephemera that are so redolent of the past, but I wanted to extend and intensify this with an inventive method of performing the story.

CURATION

“It is the work that allows the world to become visible or audible.”

(Déotte 2013, 171)

Curation in the sense of the museum or library is described and framed in many ways. There is no question that it broadly refers to what we do with the things in the collection. Joasia Krysia and Geoff Cox contend that curation “can be viewed as the practice of constructing meaning by exerting control through selection, clever arrangement, labelling, interpretation . . .” (Cox and Krysa 2006). Rosenberg agrees, adding the important caveat that such material needs to be observed “through numerous cultural lenses and frames of reference“ (Rosenberg 2009, 75). So we collect these things - the designed and discarded, the loved and unwanted, the obvious and the surprising - and we look after them. Part of the looking after is keeping them alive by sharing them. Without the community interacting with them in some way the collections don’t mean anything.

Simple, plain speaking resonates with me. And the description of curating that resonated most is *sense-making* (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld 2005). Ed Rodley, from the Peabody Essex Museum, agrees and then follows up with the view that both the object and the collection “requires strong interpretation” (Rodley 2014b, par 7). This interpretive aspect of the curation process can be seen as “a dialogical practice that is brought about through sustained relationships . . . and spaces where the brokering of divergent viewpoints, perspectives, and forms of artistic production is a central part of the curatorial work undertaken” (Chhangur 2015). I would, through the life of the curatorial process, be involved in such a dialogue: with different aspects of myself, with the past, and with the media that comprised so much of the performance.

Although the audience is part of that eventual dialogue, for the development of *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* I was initially working alone, and needed to exercise some caution. Shows like this "tend to become an autobiographical discourse . . . with varying degrees of narcissism" (Bal 2006, 531). This wariness was assuaged, as will be discussed later, through the welcome inclusion of other voices. This process, the construction of dialogue, has been identified in various contexts. Weinberger draws attention to the importance of the searcher in the archive (Weinberger 2005), Peterson invokes Van Derwal's "folksonomy" (Peterson 2006), and Sophia Liu notes the usefulness of social media in curation (Liu 2012).

Very early in the development of this work, I also embodied a strong "interest in curation as a democratizing force and a counter-narrative to the perceived aloofness of museums" (Rodley 2014b, final par). This was based somewhat on past experience with the institutions of culture in Brisbane, but like anyone who lived through the 70s in Brisbane, I also harboured a dim view of any Government entity. But as the institutions changed around the turn of the century, and I found a way to interact with them and the collections within, I needed to examine my role as a gatherer and interpreter of objects and memories. In discussions with Ed Rodley, Regan Forrest posed this very relevant question - another reason for wariness: "When does interpretation cross the line from mediation . . . into interference: 'over-interpretation'[?]" (Rodley 2014b, par 8). This question rang true to me. I knew that *audience* was important, and it followed that *performance* was going to be the principal method of framing this history, and a way of restoring criticality to the discussion. It is in the moment of performance that the performer, the audience and the archive all become variously 'contentious' in a shared place that affords immediate, critical feedback about the interpretations being presented, there and then, by the performer, while being evaluated and analysed by the audience. The feedback is instantaneous and emotionally true. The archive becomes activated but also restless and newly debatable through the moments of the performance. The curation becomes entwined with the performance.

But I struggled to find any reference anywhere to the notion of performance as a method of dissemination/education or as a factor in the curatorial/contextualising process. Much of the academic discussion about curation is centred around practice in museums and galleries (Boylan 2006), and the developing relationships between the buildings, the collections and

audiences in a post-digital world. Recent writing is littered with references to online collections and interactive exhibits (Graham and Cook 2010) and there is an element of unease within the museum about the use of 'curation' in the wider culture: "What was once the arcane domain of a privileged few is now open to seemingly everyone . . . " (Rodley 2014a, par 13). This conversation - in academic papers and blogs, between curators in museums and galleries - contains considerable passion for people who have been traditionally silent keepers of the collections.

It took a slight sidestep into the notion of *the curatorial* for me to find more familiar territory. Eszter Szakács in the excellent online *Curatorial Dictionary*, describes the curatorial as "a discipline as well as a socio-cultural practice for generating, contextualizing and making art and ideas public" (Szakács 2013, par 5). The results or outputs of this form of curatorial action can be varied, from print to exhibition. O'Neill notes that the curatorial is a reaction to traditional curating; a method which "supports more semi-autonomous and self-determined aesthetic and discursive forms of practice that may overlap and intersect" (O'Neill 2012, 57). Aneta Szylak takes this idea a further step, into what she calls 'curating context.' She sees her practice as "a practical contribution to the more general concept of the curatorial as its cognitive, affectual momentum" (Szylak 2013, 219) - useful as a way of balancing the influence of The Expert, what de Certeau defines "as the one who exchanges competence for authority" (Szylak 2013, 216). Importantly for me, she also asks the question: "How can I insert things, actions and ideas into a context that I recognize in order to make it active? How can I operate in order not to instantiate meaning, but make it happen?" (Szylak 2013, 218) In the case of *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity*, the answer to this question lies in performance. Performance is barely mentioned in writings about curation or the curatorial, except in relation to curating the ephemeral arts: performance art, dance and theatre. And yet, it is almost ubiquitous.

PERFORMANCE

"History - the past transformed into words or paint or dance or play - is always a performance."

(Dening 2002, 117)

In acknowledging the place of my voice and my body in the picture when it came to this history of the Brisbane underground music scene, with the idea of *performing* history, I was following thinking that had been around since the beginning of the last century (Dewey 2005), (Dening 1993). Using a public space and an audience opens up the ability to "move the hearts and minds . . . putting flesh, bone and breath into words and bringing them to life from the stagnant silence of the written page" (Madison and Hamera 2006, xiv).

Experimental theatre wound its way from the iconoclastic, subversive approach of Jarry - wrapped in the arms of absinthe - and the Dadaists, energised and politicised by the upheaval of the Great War; to Artaud and Brecht, driven to transform stagnant culture and the status quo; to the Situationists of the 50s, extolling the "beauties of dissolution" (McDonough 2004) in their hope for radical change; and then to the Happenings of the 60s, which fluxus artist Dick Higgins described in 1969 as: "an intermedium, an uncharted land that lies between collage, music and the theater. It is not governed by rules . . . " (Higgins and Higgins 2001). I grew up in the 60s, and the notion of a Happening was a comfortable one for me.

Around the same time, the emergence of a framework for personal narrative arrived. Labov's ability to "embrace tensions between . . . more traditional, literary approaches to narrative and more performance-based, pragmatic narrative analysis" set the scene for a significant change in thinking (Langellier 1999, 126); a "shift from studying literature in performance to performing texts of culture, identity, and experience" (Langellier and Peterson 2006, 151). Labov and Waletsky linked narrative "to *personal experience* in particular and to sense-making in general" (Bamberg 1997#335). These ideas developed through the ensuing decades as the theory deepened, spread and was drawn into practice. Kristin Langellier offers the notion that the telling is an active and disruptive force between

the experience and the story; that there is a “radical” contextualisation in play. This context is embodied in the voice/body of the performer, the present listeners and the presence of the past.

Experience is a theme that is central to personal narrative. It is also at the core of *It’s Not The Heat, It’s The Humidity*. Experience was informing the stories I was telling, re-living, using and re-using. Experience supplied the well of skills I was drawing from in order to construct and share the stories. Walter Benjamin had much to say about experience of both the storyteller and the listener, and is invoked regularly when it comes to discussions about ways to tell history. His weaving of philosophy, observation and literary skill is both deft and elegant. He was of the opinion that “experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness” (Benjamin 1968, 83). Benjamin believed that the expressive act of storytelling could re-vitalise experience: "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience - his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale” (Benjamin 1968, 96). The shared experience of the performed story binds us together.

From the mid-80s, Dwight Conquergood has been at the centre of scholarship in performance studies. He sees this liminal hybrid of written and performed work as being “a commingling of analytical and artistic ways of knowing that unsettles the institutional organization of knowledge and disciplines” (Conquergood 2002, 151), what Auslander (1992) saw as a kind of ‘resistance from within’ and embodied in performers like Spalding Gray and Andy Kauffman. I had been aware that these artists used solo performance to explain or explode ideas about culture and subculture. These artists were those who fell through accident or design into the monologue. Carefully written, frequently transgressive, always entertaining.

But how might theatrical performance be an agent in curatorial development or decision-making? References to the interdisciplinary nature of postmodern performance are common, and describe the tools of the post-punk creative scene evoked in *It’s Not The Heat, It’s The Humidity*. Carlson quotes Stern and Henderson’s *Performance: Texts and Contexts*, in

which they lay out a map of common characteristics of performance/art (and sounds very much like one of our shows in 1979) -

> . . . (3) a multimedia texture, drawing for its materials not only upon the live bodies of the performers but upon media images, television monitors, projected images, visual images, film, poetry, autobiographical material, narrative, dance, architecture, and music; (4) an interest in the principles of collage, assemblage, and simultaneity; (5) an interest in using "found" as well as "made" materials . . .
>
> (Carlson 2004, 84)

To find examples of this curation integrated with performance, we need to look beyond the literature.

MONOLOGUES

There seems to be little question that the approach taken with my show in addressing the delivery of the script was always going to be that of the dramatic monologue. In essence, a “piece to camera”: carefully scripted, and delivered in a dry, natural, measured way. Putting “the self at the heart of the spectacle” (Wallace 1999, 16); or a version of myself, at least. The textual content was looking outward towards the scene, but still hinged on memoir.

Theatrically speaking, what I was presenting was the most ancient of theatrical devices. The contemporary historical precedents for this style of monologue include William Burroughs’ routines, Alistair Cooke, Garrison Keillor, Ira Glass and Alan Bennett - most being either radio or podcast, with some late transitions to theatre or film/TV. These voices have influence in their sound and style and are highly effective in cultural and commercial recognition. And there was an Australian artist who took the idea of the ‘slide night’, a suburban monstrosity of the 50s, and transformed it into a beautiful marriage of imagery, monologue and memory.

William Yang is a gay Australian man of Chinese descent - these facts are the garden of his work. He is a poet, an actor and photographer - these are the tools with which he works. To describe it simply: William presents a slide show, and performs a script. Since 1989 and his first work, *The Face of Buddha*; through stage shows and documentaries (*Sadness, The North, Blood Links, Shadows*), Yang has created and maintained a singular place in Australia's cultural landscape, whether we are discussing photography, performance or subcultures.

Yang's pieces are simple. Large-format pictures; a man speaking directly to the audience from a script; a straightforward, honest style with no excess, no frills. It is this simplicity and openness in the performance space which "creates an exchange between the subjects of his images and the audience" (Grehan and Scheer 2016, 31). Yang describes arriving at his method: "If I'd consciously searched I couldn't have found a more succinct method. It joins my two creative processes - the documentarist in me and the creator of fiction" (Grehan and Scheer 2016, 41). These words rang loud in my ears. I felt that the performance I was developing was finally drawing together the things that I was good at, the things I loved doing and the history I was attempting to address.

Among the monologists, William Yang's work also resonated with me for its subject matter. He used his camera as a way of gaining entry and as a shield. His photos of gay sub-culture in Sydney in the 1970s were the food for his first solo photographic exhibition, which documented " the development of a sense of belonging and connection that incorporates and moves beyond the usual bounds of family" (Grehan and Scheer 2016, 31). There are aspects of any sub-culture which eventually reveal as familial, and the punk scene in Brisbane in the late 1970s was no exception. It is the family you choose to join; the one where judgement and expectation have no home. I had to admit that these people I was writing about - whose faces filled my screen; whose songs and voices filled my ears - were my other family.

There is scant evidence of Spalding Gray in the academic terrain. Most writing about him appears in *The Village Voice, The New Yorker, The New York Times* - this is his millieu. In fact, critics within the avant-garde theatre from which he emerged - the 'environmental' theatre of The Performance Group and then The Wooster Group - were less than happy with his

shift into the mainstream. Gray developed a “sophisticated theatrical persona, who himself reenacts an awakening onstage designed to sensitize the audience to its own awareness” (Demastes 1989, 75). The criticism was centred around his movement away from the ‘community’ that developed in the 60s - politically motivated and with a focus on ending the war in Vietnam - towards a solitary, reflective approach. He wasn’t alone in this, but it was *his* autobiographical monologues that captured the imagination of the postmodern 80s. His appearances in David Byrne’s *True Stories* (Byrne 1986) and Jonathan Demme’s documentary *Swimming To Cambodia* (Demme 1987) resulted in a global audience for his particularly ironic persona.

Even though the monologues appeared narcissistic and inward-looking, their effects were subtle and intensely felt. They created “a bond more true than any ‘hand-holding’ could strive for” (Demastes 1989, 78). Gray admits his narcissism, his self-awareness, but it is this ability to see himself so clearly that allows the audience in to a similar space. So it became a more thoughtful and textured process: “Instead of direct surface confrontation, undercurrents began to play a central role” (Demastes 1989, 79). Gray uses events from his life, but notes that there is a distancing that occurs in the performing. This, then, becomes an exegetic process, and transforms the piece from confession - or therapy - into art. I see an echo of this as an essential element of *It’s Not The Heat, It’s The Humidity* - the layers of media, the textual style, the staging - all contribute to a stepping away from the perception that this is a historical document and into the truth of this being a creative work with its basis in memory and reflection.

These artists engage audiences - this is, after all, entertainment - but there is more to it. Their ability to “reconfigure cultural identification” (Tompkins 2001, 49) is brought to the fore, and this is their true contribution. I had hopes that *It’s Not The Heat, It’s The Humidity* would fulfil a similar function, that it would change people’s perception about this little blip in Brisbane’s cultural story; and that the performed work would, in the moment of performance, facilitate a lasting change in our perception of this place.

This trek through the literature had given me a map. Music and other cultural scenes had been written about; documentaries had been made; papers had been presented. All had

different elemental styles and different aesthetics. Although there was much to inform my project in the work of these performers and writers, what I was creating was not represented. I needed to develop a new way to look at Brisbane’s cultural history, and this music/social scene in particular - it demanded its own mode of articulation.

CHAPTER 4 – METHODOLOGY

"The novelists, the painters, the composers, the filmmakers give us the tropes of our day, alert us to the fictions in our non-fiction, and give us our freedoms"

(Dening 2002, 1).

This project started with a title - *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* - and was conceived as a written work based on interviews with interested parties[6] about their working lives. I was hoping to catch some themes across their memories; some echoes from the past bouncing around peoples' answers.

The first interview I filmed was with 96-year-old Bill Leeke. Bill's stories about being a musician in Brisbane were fascinating, opening a door to a world I didn't know existed. But he stared down the lens at one point and expressed a frustration felt by anyone trying to make art in this town - *"I feel the community, generally, is a musical desert - at least around here"* (Leeke 2010). In the middle of the shot, he shifted his gaze to the window, the suburbs and the wasteland beyond.

Although these words were important, it was the picture of Bill sitting there, searching for the right words to say; the sound of his voice finally giving the words life: these aspects of the moment captured me. I had also, through this time, been writing about the music that was part of our lives in the late 70s; writing about films we shot, the art and music we made through those years - trying to describe the energy, the angst, the smalltown-ness. I realised that the text would never do justice to these moments, nor the things in the shed – the posters, handbills, photos and footage - that I was using to help frame my tale. It was his face, hands, the gaze, the sound of his voice - these held the story.

[6] The original list was 6 women and 18 men. Although there were many women in bands at the time, most had moved away from Brisbane and were inaccessible on a limited budget.

I had to move away from the inertness of the text and draw in the many strands of the multidisciplinary practice that comprises my working life. At first, it appeared to be some sort of live documentary: writing a script, illustrating it with the ephemera from the past and adapting the narration to suit the illustrated script. But it became clear from my research that this was overwhelmingly a curatorial process:

- the acquisition - gathering together of things/ideas/words
- the identification of the parts - cataloguing and establishing provenance; building a collection
- the drawing of connections and conclusions - sharing a story

Some writings about curation and the curatorial hinted at possibilities: “critical operations of the curatorial hinge on acts that are public and plural, unpredictable and evolving” (Pierce 2013, 98) but in 2010 there was very little I could find to illuminate me, beyond the feeling that I was on the right track. I kept the principles of curation in sight and began to put illustrated lectures together. The first couple of presentations (one for my fellow PhD candidates and one keynote address at a small seminar in Sydney) were messy, but vital, and the feedback was universally positive. People loved what they saw and heard.[7] Loved seeing the saturated shudder of the Super 8 films; the immediacy of the photographs and the rawness of the music. It was a form of time travel.

As my role as curator began to develop, so my thinking began to shift in relation to what I was doing with my body in this situation. At its simplest, I was standing in front of people, reading from a sheet of paper. Although I had been performing for more than 30 years up to this point, in these presentations I was essentially reading a script that tied the slides together. I was trying to keep it reasonably personal; to keep references to familiar places and events, and it was usually amusing but it was quite one-dimensional. So I started to look at my part in this process from a performance point of view. Toying with the idea that I was developing a persona, admitting that the character and I were different entities on the same spectrum. I had found echoes in the work of others but nothing quite like where I was

[7] See Appendix 2a

coming from, or going to. At this point, using narrative theory as a guide, the whole nature of the work shifted and a completely new approach became necessary.

I made a decision to deliver my take on the Brisbane scene as a creative work. Rather than an illustrated lecture containing informative data, it would be a dense, multidisciplinary public event, with the power to evoke the emotional, familial, creative nature of this period in Brisbane's subcultural history. It would demand all my skills, seeded in those late 70s and honed over decades, to serve the story that would arrive in the making. I knew the work would be rich in image and sound; flickering film; music unheard for decades; voices and faces animated and stilled; and that it would embrace "the complexity that plays out when individuals, their environments and their communities insinuate each other. And by experiencing it ... know it in the manner that is appropriate to complexity" (Gibson 2010, 8). I wasn't certain as to what this story was, even though I had an inkling of what it looked like, but now I had the theory - curatorial and performative[8] - and the tools - a life of practice as an interdisciplinary artist - to make it and tell it.

Although the content of the performance would certainly be a new, unique, version of the story of Brisbane's punk scene, it was the process which demanded the innovation. The considered use of performance as a curatorial agent, supported by theory and research, and developed through practice, is mapped out here in the exegesis as a model for future history-making. This, then, is the contribution to knowledge: a new way of using research-based performance to curate sub-cultural history.

[8] The use of 'performative' in this exegesis is confined to its oldest meaning, as a way of describing processes relating to theatrical performance. I invoke this meaning rather than the meaning ascribed by linguists or cultural theorists, where it may be used to describe the consummation of an action, or the act itself; or the construction of identity.

CHAPTER 5 – EPHEMERA

INTRODUCTION

Reconstructing the mood and texture of the times discussed in *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* would have been impossible without the wealth of visual and aural material gathered together for the project. In recent years, web 2.0 has enabled things once lost to be found. To be discussed, coloured and cleaned, shared and re-positioned. In the case of Brisbane's underground music scene, ephemera become an essential and evocative ingredient. The number, range and quality of these remnants are out of proportion to the size of this scene and its fleeting temporality. Lines blur between the disciplines and between the purpose and effect of the disposed. Cassettes, posters, fanzines and clothes were created quickly and cheaply, in sun-rooms blasted by the summer light, or in the dark coolness under houses and in garages. Pens, paper, photocopiers, cameras and tape decks were the tools of this creation and skills were developed on the run.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs have the power to "move us out of our own stories and into another's in a way which prefigures our own mortality" (Grehan and Scheer 2016, 111). Marianne Hirsch reveals the duality of family photographs, that the image is both a representation of an idea, and the idea itself. The photograph "gives the illusion of being a simple transcription of the real . . . it perpetuates familial myths while seeming to record actual moments in family history" (Hirsch 1997, 7). The photographs which make up part of the messy montage which is *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* are rarely family photographs. There is little of the ritual of posing and preparing, the sense that there is a history, or at least a moment of it, being captured. The photos that carry the most powerful resonance are very simple: someone happened to be in this place, at this time, with a camera.

The most revealing photographs uncovered in researching this work come from Paul O'Brien. Paul, equally enthusiastic about music and photos, took hundreds of black and white shots of some historic inner-city gigs in the dying years of the 70s. The revelation lies in the fact that the lens is not often pointed at the stage, but at the crowds. Slumped in corners, crouched on staircases, sprawled across footpaths, they ARE the scene - the splay of drunken late night legs, black clothes and spiky hair, the sneers, the smokes, the flagons and the night. He stands in the midst of the crowd, slowly turning and shooting.

Paul's photographs are a refreshing contrast to the innumerable shots of bands and band members, either live on stage or staged in publicity shots that often are assumed to visually define a scene. In describing pictures of the departed, Hirsch calls them revenants - ghosts: a "return of the lost and dead other" (Hirsch 1997, 5). She echoes Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*: whose vision of a photograph holding two realities "at the same time: *this will be* and *this has been;* I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake" (Barthes 1981, 96). He was gazing at a picture of a condemned man, long dead, but it applies to all people in all photographs: they are both alive and dead, future and past, here in front of our eyes and yet not. As I spend hours and hours poring over the faces, the eyes, the gestures in order to find those unique hints that will tell my story, I am often overwhelmed by what Barthes called the "defeat of Time" (Barthes 1981, 96).

As revealing as the photographs, but in a very different way, are all the other things: bits of paper in boxes, tapes in cartons on the top shelf, scribbled set-lists and lyric sheets. And because they don't seem to have people captured in them, unlike photographs, we are often more careless with them as the tide of years sweeps slowly in. We hold onto them for so many reasons. Often, there is a sense of 'unfinishedness' about them – we are not done with them yet. And as we engage with what Richard Ford calls "the leading edge" of our lives - the daily needs of living - these things are put aside, to be sorted later. But they have a stored energy, they are "in need of expression" (Ford 2006) and when the time comes, we are compelled to address the value of our boxes of memories.

EPHEMERA

Julie Anne Lambert, in her paper *Immortalizing the mayfly: Permanent ephemera: An illusion or (virtual) reality?*, sees ephemera as lying somewhere between book and print culture (Lambert 2008, 145) and surviving largely "by chance, not just in libraries, but also in museums, archives, local studies collections, and other institutions, each of which has its own ways of describing the objects in its care" (Lambert 2008, 152). This is undoubtedly true in my hometown of Brisbane, where there is no clear-cut home for sub-cultural ephemera. These bits and pieces have, over time, found places to rest in the library and museum, in the hands of art galleries and private collectors but mostly on the walls or under the beds of the general public.

In the same publication, *RBM – A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Cultural Heritage*, Michael Twyman, taking a much wider view, sees ephemera as cultural or commercial products with an intentionally limited life:

> music . . . playing cards, paper bags . . . labels, invoices, leaflets, circulars, notices, charts, and tabular work, maps and plans, invitations and tickets . . . greeting cards, scraps, certificates, reward cards, trade cards, cigarette cards, labels, calendars, product display cards, and prestigious invitations.
>
> (Twyman 2008, 50)

They are peripheral to the central workings of the culture, though invaluable for the researcher. He warns us: "Those who study . . . cultural history, without adequate consideration of ephemera, will form a highly restricted, or even distorted, view of their subject" (Twyman 2008, 57).

The Brisbane underground music scene in the late 70s, like other places in the world at the time, was saturated with the DIY ethos. John Gross, reviewing David Ensminger's *Visual Vitriol: the street art and subcultures of the punk and hardcore generation* (Ensminger 2011), describes a Houston scene very much like the one in Brisbane. Punk music was "designed to

be of the moment, immediate, in direct contrast to the cold distance of stadium rock and the inaccessibility of major record labels. It was designed to be fast, cheap and out of control" (Gross 2011). The ephemera that litter the scene are transformed by time. They "change from a way of saying 'this is happening' to a way of saying 'I was there' . . . [and] provided crucial context about the bands, their scenes and their times" (Gross 2011). It is this sense of the crucial or critical that I wanted to address with *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity,* with a very real sense that in a few short decades much of these ephemera, and our ability to make sense of it, will be lost.

Ensminger's book is a study of street art: flyers for gigs, graffiti and stencils, which he describes as "archival mile markers and assertive mementos . . . [They] openly espouse punk's sense of endless struggle, its hope and hopelessness, and its irony and humor, which are often overlooked" (Ensminger 2011, 9). This also applies to the handbills, posters and fanzines (as well as the music) that illustrate the Brisbane scene. Although much is made of the repressive politics of the time and the conservative state government's attitude toward youth and youth culture, this humour is a strong underpinning of much of the work, whether musical or visual or theatrical. In the case of the magazines used in *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity*, they were made, principally, for fun. They were made collaboratively and as a social distraction. The late 70s in Brisbane were boring. It was a sheltered workshop in a period of high unemployment. We made these artefacts because that was the norm in the sub-culture: do it yourself, make everything, make it simple, make it fast - keeping *our* culture out of corporate hands. My unpaid day job was making music in bands which meant: writing and rehearsing; recording and playing live gigs; lugging gear - drinking beer; designing and screen-printing posters and handbills – long, cold nights with a sore back and a head full of thinners and Marlboro smoke. Silk-screens, paper stencils, spray-cans were all used to get the messages (regardless of the enigmatic content) out into Brisbane's streets: on shirts and walls and skin. We had no cars, no money. We walked the streets of this town through the night, suburb to quiet suburb, following the ridges, pounding the beat.

EPHEMERA - AN EXAMPLE

Some of those long evenings were spent with scissors and glue and paper and ink. Some of the long days were spent at the Institute of Technology in the city, feeding the photocopiers - impersonating students. This process Ensminger calls “folk art - often hand-drawn, hand-assembled collages taped or glued into place before being copied and stapled” (Ensminger 2011, 9), though we would have been uncomfortable with being called ‘folk’ (my love of Peter, Paul and Mary would have been a guilty secret). These bits of paper - ink fading, glue darkening with age, edges softening, corners disappearing - have attained importance in this story that could never have been seen back in those years.

It’s Not The Heat, It’s The Humidity contains hundreds of images, lumps of footage, music tracks and scans of print materials. As an example of the curatorial process, I would like to contextualise some items that appear, fleetingly, in both the text and the media projected during the performance. “The object, the ephemeral artefact, is a prism, through which the stories combine to make white light – a real illumination of the darkening past” (Willsteed 2015). As will be examined later, these items were used to illustrate the DIY nature of the times, to add depth and context to the script, and to play their part as integral, integrated layers of a live performance of a cultural history archive.

In late 1978 I moved into a house in New Farm, abandoned my ponytail and threw myself into the (by now) post-punk scene. In a rambling old house, close to the river and the wharves, in an environment of high unemployment[9] supported by a recently emboldened welfare system[10], and with an abundance of hot nights and long days - we started making things. This was a time pre-internet and mobile phone: when Polaroids and cassettes and Super 8 and graphic art were the tools of communication. Making mail art was fun (see Fig 1), influenced by Dada and Fluxus artists, and generated by a web of like-minded people around the globe, connected by stamps and address-books and magazines. It was a daily

[9] The unemployed rate doubled from 2.5% in 1972 to more than 5% in 1978. Youth figures were more dramatic, rising to more than 12% in 1978.

[10] The Whitlam government, elected in 1972, doubled the payment for single unemployed people between 1972 and 1975. (http://www.whitlam.org/gough_whitlam/achievements/healthandsocialsecurity)

activity, the ‘networking of the damned’. Formalized by Ray Johnson in New York in the 60s, mail art was a “way of communicating freely in which words, signs, texts and colours became the tools for a direct and immediate interaction” (Parmesani 2000, 77). It was Art, made small, fast, cheap and transportable. Here are Wendy Cernak’s underwear sealed in plastic; here, the remnants of a suitcase containing someone’s life, abandoned and sent to me, piece by tiny piece, testing the patience of Australia Post; here are handmade post cards, notable for their inked topography, deep gouges the legacy of obsessive, late-night nib-work. Photocopiers became the workbench of choice: the locations of cheap or free copiers frantically shared with the like-minded in the knowledge that this resource could disappear in an instant. Rubber stamps carved from anything handy, perforated postage stamps, deceptively elaborate or hopelessly inept – all designed to bring a joy whose success could only be measured by the content of the return mail.

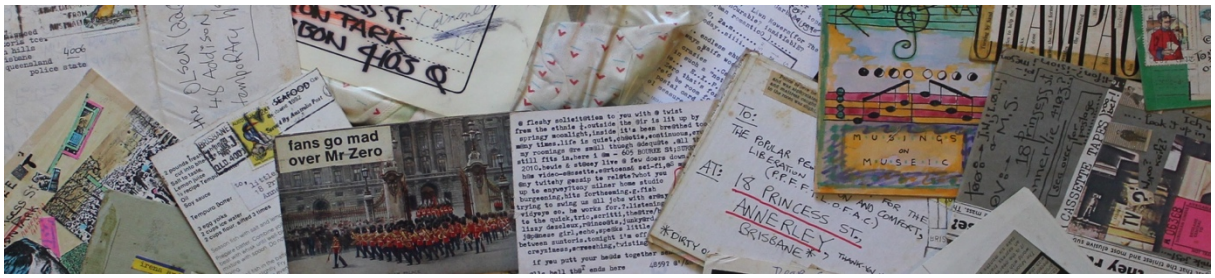

Fig. 1 - Mail Art, 1978-1980. From the author’s collection.

But we soon moved on from letters and postcards to magazines (see Fig.2). These ephemera, as they surely are, started out as photocopied, short run mags, addressed, stamped and flung out into a harsh world. The first, DK, produced in the winter of 1979, was 20 pages, A4, black and white Xeroxed; mostly collages. This DIY approach was, according to Ensminger, “a new language of rupture and roughness . . . a metaphor for punk's challenge to watered-down corporate mentality” (Ensminger 2011, 9). DK was produced by Gary Warner and a handful of contributors, including me, and we were all members of a close-knit social scene. There were no more than 50 copies and it contained a couple of “advertisements” of sorts, which give it the flavour of a fanzine. But it wasn’t.

Fig. 2 - Covers of DK/Decay magazines, 1979/1980. Artwork by Gary Warner and John Willsteed

These mags didn't happen in isolation. There is no question that the influence of the Dadaists pervaded these works, especially the journals - *Dada*, *Cabaret Voltaire* and *Cannibale* - and the works of Max Ernst, George Grosz and Kurt Schwitters. This connection between Brisbane punk/post-punk art and Dada has been made before. Danni Zuvela, discussing the exit of artists[11] from Brisbane in the Bjelke-Petersen years, cites Ursula Szulakowska:

> Those who stayed collaborated in the creation of a distinctive counter-culture marked by interdisciplinarity, sedition and experiment, whose potent Dadaist undercurrents Ursula Szulakowska described as "a similar response to the (canonical Dadaists') destructive political situation and the inheritance of a stagnant culture"
>
> (Zuvela 2008, 46)

There were other influences, ones that inspired feelings of global kinship in a pre-internet world. We avidly consumed *RAW Magazine*, published in New York by Françoise Mouly and Art Spigelman. The first issue, in July 1980, was subtitled "*The Graphix Magazine of Postponed Suicides*". As well as the work of more than 25 graphic artists, it also contained the first episode of a small-format (roughly A5) serialized graphic novel, Art Spigelman's *Maus*. Brisbane graphic artist Damien Ledwich had sent over from London issues of his A6

[11] Graffiti at the Queensland Cultural Centre building site in 1985: "95% of artists leave Brisbane. Why don't you?"

comix *Neil Hissum* and *Catastrophe*, published by AR-ZAK as part of their Microcomik series in 1979. Small was beautiful.

Over the next year or two, as the “publisher” morphed into Decay House Films Ink, they produced about ten A6 magazines: some hand-coloured; some containing colour Xerox elements, which was then in its infancy and thought to be extremely groovy. It is common for such ephemera to “chronicle technological and cultural shifts in contemporary history” (Ensminger 2011, 9) by using cutting edge technology in these seemingly frivolous activities. Such sub-cultural phenomena are often “products of self-taught, naive, or frequently skilled artists” (Ensminger 2011, 9). The magazines followed a familiar pattern: some text, some pen and ink drawing, some photo-collage, lots of Xerox manipulation, and sent through the post or hand-delivered. We discussed dreams a lot, and one another – we were the characters in our little narratives. Self-portraits were common.

Among the many resonating ideas from elsewhere that made a significant impact was Fast Forward, from Melbourne (see Fig. 3) - a cassette magazine. And as an affordable, accessible tool for creativity, sharing and social cohesion, cassettes had no parallel until the explosion of file-sharing in the late 90s. Ernie Althoff describes them as “well developed, inexpensive and well integrated into ordinary, non-academic, society . . .” and they fit “. . . comfortably into a sociopolitical, music-making framework” (Althoff 2002). All in all, there were 11 issues of Fast Forward produced between 1980 and 1982. It was built like a radio show: interviews, music, cut-ups, and some neat packaging. This look inspired our next layer of work: Zip. Moving slowly from the edge towards the centre.

Fig. 3 - Fast Forward magazines, 1980-1982. Artwork by Michael Trudgeon

The Zip collective contained members of the original Decay-makers and produced three cassette magazines from late 1982 to 1984. Production elements had been extended to include cassettes of original music and offset-printed pages with screen-printed covers and cards. These were available for sale by mail order and in selected record and bookstores in clear Ziplock bags. Although this was now a product with a commercial aspect, the nature of the mags remained the same – we were committed to the same format and similar content as the previous visual work. The sample bags of the deranged.

The final transmission, in 1985, was a 7” square format, offset-printed 56-page book with a 7” vinyl single inserted inside the back cover. ZIP.EYE.EAR was produced with the aid of a grant from the Australia Council of The Arts. The content complied broadly with the aesthetic intention and structural form we had been following for seven years. This was our last paper work together, before all of these things became lost in time – what Nik Pollard calls “the waste of today, the evidence of tomorrow” (Pollard 1977, 15). None of these things I ever imagined talking about 35 years later.

EPHEMERA CONCLUSION

When I started this process, I was using the items in my collection - the photographs, the posters and handbills, the little mags - in order to illustrate and embellish the text I was writing. Inversely, the pieces sometimes functioned like a jigsaw, revealing gaps in the story, or sometimes leading into tangential, but essential, territory. This led me to begin to gather more things - on paper, on tape, online - and, more importantly, to gather information about all these items. That information came mostly in the form of Facebook discussions which were an invaluable resource, not only in the establishment of provenance of items but also in the fleshing out of stories about the past. These stories were fascinating, but sometimes contradictory, and although this was hardly a surprise, I was drawn to ponder how a version of history might be managed.

CHAPTER 6 – CURATION

"In thinking about situations or contexts where we find the artist as curator, it is important to remember that the curatorial evolves *through* artistic practice."

(Pierce 2016, final par)

CURATING EPHEMERA

The knowledge that the ephemera discussed in the previous chapter are mostly in the collections of the general public is both challenging and exhilarating. In a world obsessed with sharing, Brisbane's underground music history is being re-constructed and re-vitalised. The role of social media in the development of what is a disparate collection of material cannot be over-estimated. From enhancing engagement in recent reunion gigs to tagging and identifying items placed into online settings, social media works to bind ephemera from personal collections, and to open the material to research and formal inquiry. But Brisbane is a town, and a political environment, whose focus is more on progress than heritage. How do cultural institutions conserve and expand the sub-cultural heritage of the city? The role of the institution, in this case the State Library of Queensland, is pivotal in fixing and contextualizing this important data, as an adjunct to not only the accepted "mainstream" history of Brisbane music but also the chaotic, heavily subjective online versions.

This chapter proposes a considered method for curating these ephemeral discards. It notes the relationship between the public and the institution in holding these objects in particular style and regard. It also proposes the intervention and influence of an 'interested party', or insider, as a curatorial agent, whose duty of care is to facilitate the transfer of objects and information to the institution, and to filter and contextualize the many layers of memory surrounding those objects that already exist in the public domain.

INSTITUTIONAL CURATION

"Rather than having objects speak for themselves, museum professionals interpret cultural significance for visitors by structuring art and artifacts around easily identifiable chronologies, geographies, formal themes, and narratives."

(Casey 2003)

The first of the curatorial methods being examined here is that exercised by public institutions – galleries, museums and libraries. Institutional curating involves a complex set of behaviours. Ann Marie Van de Ven is a curator at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Australia, and maintains that:

> being discerning involves standing one step back from your own personal preferences, choosing not necessarily what you like, but what's significant in context . . . Personal taste shouldn't take precedence in curatorial work. Personal preference is one of the last emotions one brings to professional considerations when assessing, collecting or curating – not the first.
>
> (Van de Ven 2014, par 3)

She also draws attention to the unease with which she must negotiate the prioritizing of "meaning, significance and aesthetics" (Van de Ven 2014, par 6), an unease offset by the pleasure of drawing story-lines across time and disciplines and culture – by the joy at finding what Allison Marsh calls the "latent connections . . . waiting to be made across the museum" (Marsh and Wade 2013, Ch 4).

In 1944, fifteen years before Robert Sharman was appointed as the first Archivist at the State Library of Queensland, John Metcalfe travelled north from Sydney to review the library's practices. Metcalfe was the Principal Librarian at the Public Library of New South Wales. David Jones' biography describes him as an energetic, bright, mercurial character who was instrumental in setting the scene for serious librarianship in Australia through his roles in the

establishment of both our first library training institutions and our public library system (Jones 2012). He was also deeply involved in the Free Library Movement and was convinced that we "need institutions which will ensure that we know the best that has been and is being thought and said, pictured and played, written and read by our people" (Metcalfe 1945, 96). He owed something in this statement to Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869).

Metcalfe was scathing about the practices he unearthed on his trip north. Sharman quotes Metcalfe's comments on the custodial weaknesses that lay beneath the destruction of important ephemeral items while others were being "pathetically preserved" (Sharman 1963, 169) and also on the lack of skill and discernment exhibited by staff, where "mere curio value is often confused with historical value" (Sharman 1963, 168). Metcalfe was adamant about the value of "democratic culture . . . arising out of and expressing itself in our everyday life and work, in the things we use and the things we make" (Metcalfe 1945, 91) but was less than confident in the library's ability to recognize or preserve that culture.

When Robert Sharman accepted the role of archivist, he was amazed by the fact that the archives weren't being accessed by postgraduate students, and saw it as "an interesting indication of Queenslanders' disbelief that their own state could provide any material of interest" (Sharman 1963, 175). To some extent, this attitude lingered into the latter part of the century. And even though the Queensland Libraries Act, legislated in 1988, was clear in the mandate handed to the library - that all material published in Queensland should be represented in the library, and receipted by staff - the library through the 70s, 80s and even the 90s had difficulty knowing what was what in relation to popular cultural or sub-cultural ephemera. The list in the Act last amended in 2012, covers some ground but is dated in its approach – the broad sweep of the digital is not even acknowledged:

a) a book, or a part or division of a book;
b) a newspaper, magazine, journal or pamphlet;
c) a map, plan, chart or table;
d) printed music;
e) a film, tape, disk or other like instrument

(Queensland Government 2012).

This intent to capture what is published is augmented by the very real advantages of the institution: standards for digitisation and storage; systems for cataloguing and preservation; and most importantly, professionally trained staff. Institutions also have strong sharing and access policies and procedures that make available massive amounts of data and other material of clear benefit to both scholars and the general public alike. They also have the ability, or responsibility, to "collect the present in anticipation of the future" (Marsh and Wade 2013, Ch 3). It is a process with which responsibilities are bound, as Sandra Braman points out:

> Those who are responsible for maintenance of a culture's "heritage" must decide which works should receive the kind of storage and care that will permit them to survive into the future, for art provides some evidence of the ways in which society sees itself at present and directions in which it would like to go in the future.
>
> (Braman 1996, 2)

Back in the 70s, though, the larger public cultural institutions, as agencies of the government, supported attitudes that were pervasive: political conservatism, an unbridled enthusiasm for the classics, a comforting sense of separation from the outside world.

Nearly 15 years ago, I dropped a box of small format magazines into the State Library. Things I had made, things I had collected. There was a 'thank you' letter in the post eventually, and then they disappeared from sight and from mind. A decade later, I went looking for them. There were phone calls and emails, and after a year or so, they turned up. The initial donation was mislaid, filed under 7 different areas of the catalogue - mainly because it didn't fit into the narrative of the library's function back in 2000. The experience was unnerving, and functions as a catalyst for this area of my research. As one of the librarians noted: "at the time . . . it was not our usual practice to put the name of the donor on the catalogue record . . . We have changed our view on that in recent years."[12]

[12] Extract from email, State Library of Queensland to the author.

That change is welcome, and it's certainly true that current institutional archiving is very different to what it was thirty years ago. The current Director of Digital Archives at the Queensland State Archives is Adrian Cunningham:

> . . . this needs to be a world where private records are not viewed as somehow being fundamentally different from public records and where personal records are not regarded as being fundamentally different from corporate records – where a record is a record is a record.
>
> (Cunningham 2014, par 5)

While my little magazines were languishing in the institutional dark, there were some avid culture fans who had been collecting similar things for years, and looking for ways to share what they loved. As Lambert points out: "libraries have collected books or ephemera in a general way, but a specialist collection compiled by an individual . . . has a unique value far beyond the sum of its parts and is indispensable" (Lambert 2008, 148). It is the individual, with a shoebox of photographs or a tube of posters and an interest in the past, who can be pivotal by playing a part in the making of history. Just as the internet, home of the specialist collector and the soil from which blogs and Facebook grew, is valuable beyond measure in the curation of these ephemera.

CITIZEN CURATION

Since 2008, *That Striped Sunlight Sound*[13] blog has been a consistent home for disappeared sounds. It has digitized music and cover art of more than 800 Australian underground or independent recordings – albums, singles, vinyl, cassette, radio broadcasts, interviews and bootlegs – with a particular emphasis on Brisbane punk and post-punk music. It is the sharing of a collection, and more. People add comments that invoke memories and draw connections, giving context and authenticity to the collection and agency to the participants - exercising what Sarah Baker and Alison Huber would call "vernacular expertise" (Baker and Huber 2015). These people are not here by accident. They are searching for something –

[13] http://stripedsunlight.blogspot.com.au/

whether it's the academic or the nostalgic – it's not aimless. David Weinberger talks about these searchers: "An author is an authority when it comes to what she intended her work to be about . . . When it comes to searching, what a work means to the searcher is far more important than the author's intention" (Weinberger 2005, par 1). He goes on to discuss the rise of a kind of citizen taxonomy, what Van Derwal called a 'folksonomy', allowing "many users with various perceptions to classify a document" (Peterson 2006, 3). Sophia Liu also sheds light on the range of curatorial approaches -

> Traditional curators tend to play a mediating role by adapting their curatorial skills to the needs of other stakeholders. Unlike this traditional form of curation, where the curator takes on many roles and functions, curation in the social web context is occurring in a more distributed fashion through a socio-technical process involving many people.
>
> (Liu 2012, 33)

Bob Nebe is the man who runs *That Striped Sunlight Sound*. He started collecting in 1979, and used his collection, including some of the magazines referred to in this thesis, to ignite the blog. The public add to it in an organic way, as interest drifts and people come and go. Although he maintains the site as a labour of love, he acknowledges its problems: links disappear, copyright is an ongoing and complex issue, and there is no plan for succession.

In a personal example which exposes the reach of such items, Dell Stewart, a designer and animator in Melbourne, found digitised copies of *Fast Forward* on a website hosted by Greg Wadley's *Spill Label*[14] and it prompted memories of the *Zip* packages her aunt in Brisbane posted to her when she was younger. Cultural care packages from the Deep North:

> The music and the whole package was a huge influence and a key to me ending up in the printmaking department screen-printing books and posters. I hope they are still in my things somewhere. They felt like rare treasures from another world at the time, but even so, I am glad we have the internet to make some of this more accessible, allowing me to re-listen without digging through cupboards at my parents place

[14] http://www.spill-label.org/home.php

(Stewart 2011, par 1).

That Striped Sunlight Sound and *Spill* are two examples of websites where collections of ephemeral Brisbane musical work can be found. There are also a growing number of excellent Facebook pages, public and private, which are full of photos and stories that flesh out this scene. They contain images of items that are also in the library collection, the *ZIP* packages for example and the Paul O'Brien photographs, though here they are surrounded by comments and memories and, most importantly, context. But there is an inherent danger in this citizen archive. The information in posts can be inaccurate or misleading, and is prey to the administrator or page-owner's whims. And the sites, like the participants, change and sometimes disappear. Xuan Zhiao's research into social media curation unveils a somewhat brutal reality: "as social media data 'expires' from the public's attention, it also gradually transitions into a personal space where it is mostly seen as an archive of meaningful memories" (Zhao et al. 2013, 7). She also draws attention to the curatorial nature of Facebook itself, which "acts as an invisible curator who manages, redistributes, and selectively displays content for audiences" (Zhao et al. 2013, 2) -

> When we step back and think about Facebook's curation policies, the most salient is based on temporality. Facebook . . . arranges content around the time that it is created, resulting in recent content being prioritized while earlier content flows backwards into one's online identity exhibition.
>
> (Zhao et al. 2013, 8)

Time is the enemy here, and without the structure and intent of the institution, these valuable resources can easily drift away, regardless of the generosity and good will of the energetic, sometimes obsessive, collectors. But there is a player who can bridge these two curatorial methods.

PARTICIPANT CURATION

"While archivists . . . portray themselves as the documenters or collectors of our society, if the truth be told many of their holdings were already . . . formed by individual collectors who built aggregations of documents or who worked to preserve their own . . . archives"

(Cox 2009, 9).

In attempting to rationalize these curatorial approaches, and acknowledging that curation is a methodological issue, I need to recognize my role as a participant in this scene that I am observing. The role of this style of participant curation was first made clear to me in the work of Madeleine Preston, a Sydney artist who shared a box of photographs on Facebook in 2011. They were a remnant from her life in inner city Sydney in the early 80s. A collection of ephemera, left in her hands by Maggie Woods, a dear friend, long gone. The Facebook page, *Darlinghurst Eats Its Young*, was shared and liked and commented on, building a unique, complex and rich history that had previously only existed in the shadows (Preston 2013). This was then extended into physical reality in a shopfront exhibition in Darlinghurst and finally a show of ephemera at First Draft Gallery in Woolloomoolloo, Sydney in 2013. As Preston steps into physical spaces she moves into an editorial and storytelling role beyond that of the Facebook page, and embeds her role as practitioner/curator. Preston's immersion in the history she is constructing is obvious: she was in the scene; she appears in the photographs; she has an insider's knowledge that allows her to facilitate pointed discussion and debate. Most importantly, she has both emotional connection and memory – essential to the first-hand telling of this important cultural story. Maggie's choice to give her photos to Madeleine before she died, saying: "you have no idea how important these photos will be to you" was a coercive, thoughtful act – the beginning of a curatorial journey for Preston that required her to represent, in the true sense of the word, her scene.

The participant curator adds layers of significance from memory and experience, and a thoughtful blend of the subjective and the objective, which are vitally important in any attempt to capture the complex relationships of any scene. The nature of this activity in a 'post-custodial' world is more important than it has ever been (Cox 2009). This archival

approach allowed me, in relation to Paul O'Brien's photographs, to be part of adding value to the photos when they appeared online through identification and anecdote; to be instrumental as a go-between in this collection being donated to the State Library of Queensland; to begin to identify items in the collection before it was released to the public, using a number of resources including the many people who had commented on Facebook; and to use my networks to connect interested parties and the public to this excellent resource once it became 'live'.

CONCLUSION

Sophia Liu developed a conceptual model for web curation that can be applied to the different aspects of curation at work here. Her model was exercised in the analysis of social media activity around the anniversary of the Bhopal gas disaster and entailed the definition of curatorial roles (Liu 2012).These roles are: *archivist*, *librarian*, *preservationist*, *editor*, *storymaker*, *exhibitor* and *docent*. All three curatorial methods - institutional, citizen, participant - engage with these different roles to some extent. In relation to cultural ephemera the institution is strong in collecting and preserving and exhibiting, but requires assistance with knowing what it has and what to do with it, whereas the general public and collectors don't have the ability to preserve and maintain artefacts or even their digital versions with any capacity or certainty.

The binding of these quite different but complementary curatorial methods creates a cooperative model, making useful meaning of the ephemera that litter any cultural landscape. The *institutional* curation adds broader historical integrity and a familiar, reliable construct for scholarly interest into the future. It has the advantage of established government funding and ongoing commitment twined with a corporate interest in being relevant or seen to be relevant. The social media exposure supplies breadth in social contexts and personal stories and relevance to a scene or subculture. This *citizen* curation is driven by feeling and emotion and memory. It can be chaotic but it remains the most effective way to access large numbers of people and their interests. The *participant* adds depth in the detail, more layers of context in work practices and the scene, and access to people and artefacts. But most importantly, the role of the participant/practitioner is to

draw the other curatorial interests together and to mediate the outcome from an informed and emotionally engaged position.

As a final example, I'd like to mention again the work of Paul O'Brien. I came across Paul's photographs (see Fig. 4) whilst researching the Brisbane music scene, and though I remembered him and his constant camera well, I had never seen these photographs before. Like Maggie Woods, Paul took photos at a time when hardly anyone else did. Once he made them available online, his photos of the Brisbane punk scene in the late 70s opened a floodgate of memory. They were special because they were not necessarily of bands, but pictures of punters. These people were sometimes pivotal in the scene but rarely mentioned in any histories. I coerced Paul to donate his 900 photographs to the library, and then convinced the library to allow me to be a researcher-in-residence in order to assist in contextualizing this collection. Tying the digitised images to the existing Facebook comments and stories as well as my own memories, diaries and contacts, and identifying the people, the places, the bands and dates has produced a remarkable resource for Brisbane and the State Library. It is an essential backdrop to any research of the music scene which produced The Saints, The Go-Betweens, Died Pretty, Powderfinger and many more, just as the gradual sharing of the little magazines underpins any understanding of the broader cultural underground which existed in Brisbane in the late 70s and early 80s.

Fig. 4 - Photographs by Paul O'Brien. Courtesy State Library of Queensland

The live performances of *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* were fed by these photos and magazines, the posters and all the other print material, and seasoned with songs and film footage and slices of dodgy television shows. The different elements of the curatorial process were brought to bear on all of these artefacts. These elements were present in choosing, preparing, editing and constructing the story, and at play in the subtle ways the artefacts influenced the writing of the script and the staging of the show. Curation, by revealing the underlying connections and intent of the original archive, embedded an immanent energy that was released in the performed story: the artefacts came alive.

There are positive outcomes for the institutions in validating these artefacts, and increasing nuanced awareness of this scene. Sandra Braman insists that relevance is essential to the

notion of the institution retaining cultural capital. Shifting knowledge about the culture of this city, and connecting the institution to the public through acquisitions like these, is an essential step in the growth of our cultural capital, which can only have positive social and economic outcomes for the city and the state (Braman 1996). This process, then, is a co-operation between the institution, the artists, and the scene that produces an enhanced life for the ephemera, allowing them to depart from the epiphenomenal, gliding from the edges of culture to the centre and from the dark past to the bright future.

CHAPTER 7 – THE SHOW

"Representing the past - re-presenting the past - is always a challenge to perform . . . [and] will always be reflective . . . Our creativity will always be obliged by the ideals of truthfulness."

(Dening 2002, 22)

PERFORMING CURATION/CURATING PERFORMANCE

My proposition, extracted from the first piece of writing I did on this topic, a coursework submission, was that I wanted to make: "A moody, messy sketch with 6B pencil - butcher's paper, torn edges, folded and smudged - a smuggled, secret cultural map of Brisbane music" (Willsteed 2009). I was critical of the extant histories of 'the scene' and I wanted this project to address that criticism, whose central theme was the lack of an inside voice. The challenge has been to develop an appropriate technique for telling the story. How can the messiness of an underground music scene be a model for telling the story of that scene? As the original work was transformed by both the research and the development of the presentations, I abandoned the text and embraced the disciplines of my practice. I acknowledged the storytelling inherent in making films and music; the performance inherent in being in bands and teaching and bad speechifying and its concomitant unpredictability. I made a decision to deliver this thesis as a performed work, a public event, whose theoretical heart was the blending of curation and performance. Performance was not only chosen as the ephemeral glue that binds my experiences within a range of practices - music performance, visual art, music production, film-making and teaching, but also as a vehicle for curatorial depth and nuance, and, most importantly, intimacy.

I had some ground rules, which were made early on whilst wrestling with style and content and intent, and were framed around ways of maintaining authenticity and originality.

- I wanted to place my voice in the centre of this story - as a witness to these times, a maker of these things, and a traveller in this landscape. The obligation lies with the traveller to carry the stories, to share, to make sense of and to hold dear the memories of the tribe.
- I wanted the aesthetic to make sense, to be appropriate and to fit the past. The uniqueness of the culture that was made through those years had been largely ignored, beyond the 'usual suspects' in music or visual art.
- I wanted to draw attention to the people and places which, in my mind, were at the centre of the social scene. These were people whose names were rarely, if ever, mentioned in the published stories about Brisbane and its punk/post-punk scene; places long ago turned to rubble, or so transformed as to be unrecognizable.

The integration of objects, memory, music, performance and curation, in a way, glues the past back together. Rather than talking or writing about Brisbane's punk past, it IS the past. But I have no doubt that for some people, it wasn't enough; it wasn't right; it didn't have enough facts or dates; there were no classic milestones or famous folk. Walter Benjamin understood the power of this - "it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from information while one is telling it." (Benjamin 1968, 89) The extraordinary film critic, Roger Ebert, in his final review before his death in 2013, was pondering Terence Malick's *To The Wonder*: ". . . They will be dissatisfied with a film that would rather evoke than supply . . . "(Ebert 2013). But for others, the experience was illuminating.[15] My proposal was to do both - to supply knowledge about and to evoke the mood of this particular scene.

As the performance started to be shaped and brought to life in my mind and on the page, a clear picture began to emerge of what the thing might look like, and ". . . new meanings emerged . . . about performance as a means to express, to explore, and vicariously to experience history "(Fousekis 2005a, 178). The work called for impressions of Xerox and Polaroid, cut-up and jump-cut, and to re-locate the narrator as an embodied, rather than dis-embodied, voice at the core of the story. The key to understanding is the voice; drawing up from the well of memory and at the centre of this work. This clear sound, in all its nuance;

[15] See Appendix 2b

heavy with meaning; telling stories of this town: its streets and suburbs and storms and tides and intolerance. And somewhere, in the centre of it all: the voice of the river - in its constant dialogue with the bay, the city, and the people who live here.

The early stages of the curatorial process prepared the way for performance to take the central role in the work, and to directly answer the emerging research question: *What can live performance contribute to the curation of cultural history?* In this chapter I select elements of the *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* performance and examine why particular aesthetic decisions were made, especially in relation to the research question. Early in the process, there was one constructive opportunity to test some of these aesthetic decisions and it was both fruitful and fun.

GHOST WASH

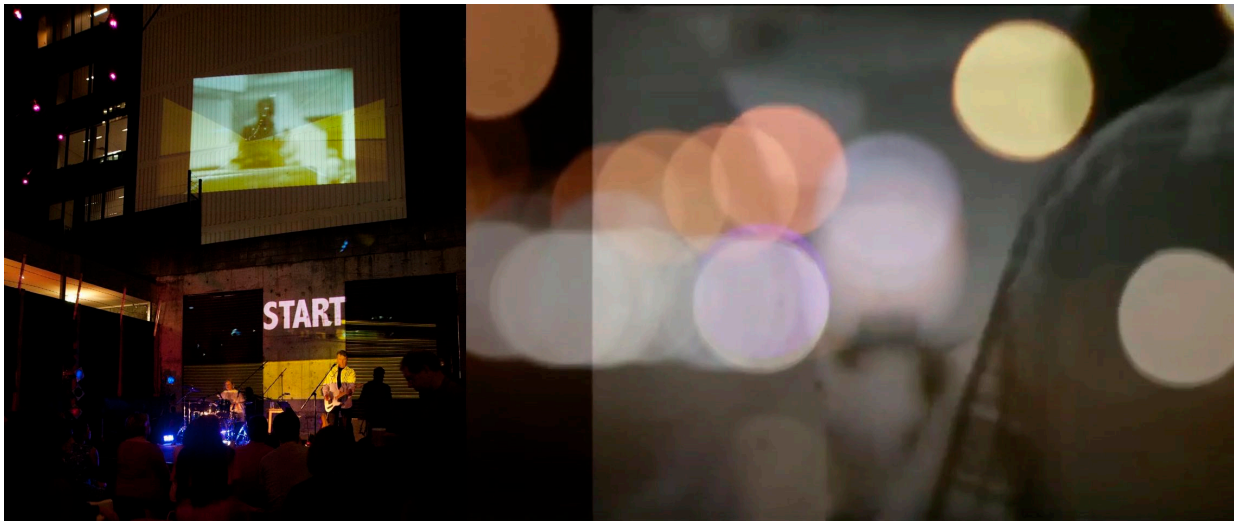

Fig. 5 - Ghost Wash at The Brisbane Festival, 2012.

Ghost Wash was performed as part of the Brisbane Festival 'Under The Radar' program over two nights in September, 2012. Tina Stevens[16] and I developed and submitted the idea of a curated performance of Brisbane songs. She played drums, I played guitar and we both sang. We chose songs from the mid 70s to the mid 80s, some kind of famous, some virtually unknown. We performed behind the Metro Arts building in Edward Street, in the centre of

[16] http://forevernow.me/artists/artwork/white-drummer-goes-under/

Brisbane. Down a dark lane and into a small open space between high-rise blocks, we played on a stage in front of movies projected up onto the city buildings behind us. (See Fig. 5) These movies, edited by Tina, contained footage from the period shot by Gary Warner and Peter McPherson, and new footage shot by Tina: driving through Brisbane's recently opened tunnel motorways, walking the streets of New Farm and the laneways of Teneriffe.

Tina and I had a musical history. We were the rhythm section in Sydney band the Plug Uglies in the late 80s and early 90s until it all fell apart. But we had also been working in the film and television world for many years. Tina was a fine film-maker, television director and has since become an internationally recognised performance artist. She was not from Brisbane, but all the other Plug Uglies were, and she had, over years, *absorbed* the place.

At the performance of *Ghost Wash*, I gave each piece of music context with unprepared stories about the songs, the times, the people. They were casual reminiscences with laughter, tears . . . the usual. It was slightly chaotic but the performances worked well, the reminiscing was well-received[17] and, most importantly, *Ghost Wash* pointed me towards a new way of performing this slice of Brisbane music history. The audience response to the performance informed the development of a script that would be embedded in personal recollection.

THE SCRIPT

Early drafts of the script for *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity*, adapted from previous presentations, had a tendency to follow a traditional, though somewhat casual, narrative essay style. Drifting through the words, shapes began to appear, and it became clear that the literal or academic would either overpower or underwhelm - "narratives of the past are not fixed; their form depends on the ways in which memories are given meaning in the present" (van der Hoeven 2015, 260).

[17] https://kellyyyllek.wordpress.com/tag/john-willsteed/

Another approach was needed, and it was simpler. I was born in 1957. The day after my ninth birthday, decimal currency arrived, with its own natty theme tune. Up until this point, my life had been lived in the glory of imperial measurements. Twelve pence in a shilling. Twelve dozens in a gross. Twelve inches in a foot. Pints. Chains. Fourteen pounds in a stone. And, in a nod to the altarboy buried deep in my past, fourteen Stations of the Cross. I developed the plot across twelve chapters, split over two nights - Northside and Southside. Two nights - like two sides of an album: the undeniable delimiter of music consumption in the 70s and 80s. The demands of the performance were driving curatorial decisions - a truth that began to be reflected in the many of the elements of the show as they grew in detail and nuance.

Although I was changing the format dramatically, I had a real concern that people would tire of what was still, ultimately, a lecture. These chapters were each introduced in performance by a *moment* of connection. Lack of time stole the original idea for these moments - twelve low lecterns on the stage, each with an item to be discussed. The intention was to echo a museum display, a white gloves talk, or a vitrine of relevant and interesting objects - the curatorial exposed: look what I have found, and listen as I draw them together into a tale. Picking a prepared item from the table, I would show the audience, talk a little about its provenance, and extract from it the script for the coming chapter, sit, then speak. [18]

Once the decision was made - two nights, twelve chapters - the map was there to follow. The curatorial and the performative were now feeding into each other as a story emerged, each chapter finding a theme - from The River, The North, The Valley, to The South and the Limit of Maps - and suggesting a direction. I had abandoned any idea that these were anything but small pieces of creative writing. The history was hidden inside and between the words. It was pouring out of the images, out of the speakers, seeping up from the past.

THE STAGING

[18] See Appendix 1

The choice of venue was important. The use of Brisbane Powerhouse, instead of the expected university venue, was an overt attempt to engage with the landscape of the story. The wharves and the old powerhouse were part of the abandoned industrial structure of the inner city. Dusty, skeletal monsters, silent and filled with light and the smell of generations of pigeons, were playgrounds for my tribe. This decision also provided a model for my future research in developing new ways of marking Brisbane's cultural history in or around relevant sites.

The way the space was utilised needed to be quite simple. A screen at the back of the space contained the projections. Here, the curatorial decisions drove the performative: the screen was going to be full of images, faces, colours, movement, so the rest of the stage needed to be sparse. Balance. Me, at the front, with two microphones - one for sitting and talking; one for standing and singing. Two music stands. Guitar to pedalboard to the VASE[19] amplifier upstage left. A stool to sit on. A rug to stand on. Centre left, a table covered with books and maps. The artefacts that fed into the story being drawn into the performance. Upstage right and keeping me company, strangely calming: Boxhead, clothed, guitar slung over its shoulder. (See Fig. 6)

[19] VASE are a Brisbane company, making beautiful guitar amplifiers since the late 1950s.

Fig. 6 - Stage at Brisbane Powerhouse, October 2015. Photo by Kate O'Sullivan

Once I had dates for the performances, I began to collaborate with QUT Master of Fine Arts student, Nathan Sibthorpe, whose thesis topic concerns staging multi-layered narratives. Nathan's invaluable contribution was in putting a frame of 'do-ability' around the project in relation to technical aspects and timelines, and then helping me to see the creative potential of the space within that frame. He was pragmatic and patient, and his work shines in how elegantly the show moved, and how well people responded to it.

Another aspect of the night which may be included here is the idea of the tiny magazines. I have previously described the small format mags and how they fit into the social/sub-cultural world in Brisbane in the 80s. Following the same notion that drove the inclusion of the interview faces and the recreation of songs - that it's more powerful to DO something rather than talk about it - I decided that everyone who came to the show would have something, some bit of ephemera, in their hands when they left. To that end, I chose four from the early 80s magazines - *Flippant*, *X-change*, *Porker* and *Xero/Lust In The Dust* - and reproduced them at half their original size. Each of the 400 audience members received a mag as they entered the show. This gesture presented each person with a unique, embodied connection to the show, the artists, and Brisbane's subcultural past. It captured how comfortably the performance and the curation were entwined. This was a time-travelling

exercise for me, and although I drastically underestimated how long it would take to hand-make these items - in the dressing room half an hour before the first show, folding, stapling, trimming and stamping - it was also strangely soothing to be exercising these skills again after so many years. (See Fig.7)

Fig. 7 - Tiny mags at home and in the dressing room.

THE INTERVIEWS

After the first presentations, through the summer of 2011, I filmed a cluster of interviews as pilots for what I thought was going to be a largely text-based ethnographic piece, with some inkling that the footage may be useful for some future documentary. The interview questions addressed some themes long since abandoned, but they were vital, engaging chats with people who contributed in a range of ways to the punk/post-punk scene in Brisbane.[20] As the focus of the work shifted, and the light was aimed at the ephemera, the performance and my own place in things, the interviews moved from the centre to the periphery. They remained, however, a small but vital part of the onstage dialogue. Walter Benjamin understood that a lived life contains many voices. The storyteller's life "comprises not only his own experience but no little of the experience of others; what the storyteller knows from hearsay is added to his own" (Benjamin 1968, 108)

[20] Gary Warner, Tony von Weildt, Coojee Timms, Ed Wreckage, Alex Waller and Sean Sennett (audio only).

The method of presenting these faces/voices on the stage was drawn from a detail on an audio artefact released in Brisbane 1981. The inside cover of *The Swell Guys* single, featured, among others, a portrait of the artist responsible for the cover, Gary Warner - cardboard box on his head, guitar in his hands. A life-size version of this image was constructed for the show, a headless plastic mannequin ably playing the part of Mr. Warner. The arms and hands were manipulated with heat into usable shapes for holding the guitar, and suitable op-shop clothing was obtained. The box-head was then used as a screen for the projection of the interviews. The footage was cropped to fit the box, and a speaker was positioned behind the figure to locate the voice. (See Fig. 8)

This allowed me the opportunity to draw 'real' voices and faces into the show, and to engage performatively with the ideas that had been presented in the interviews. It was these interviews which had shaped both the curation and the script, and set me on forensic pathways, drifting into suburbs and down trainlines foreign to me. Although I didn't pursue the interviews into the territory as originally intended, having the voices onstage suited the way the show was shaping up. At times I was able to engage in a dialogue, to ask questions and have them answered, which created a sense of connection between the narrator and the screen which would have been difficult to achieve any other way. Projections have been used in this way for some time in dramatic theatre (Meerzon 2008), but it seems to be uncommon for this type of dialogue to occur in documentary/narrative performance.

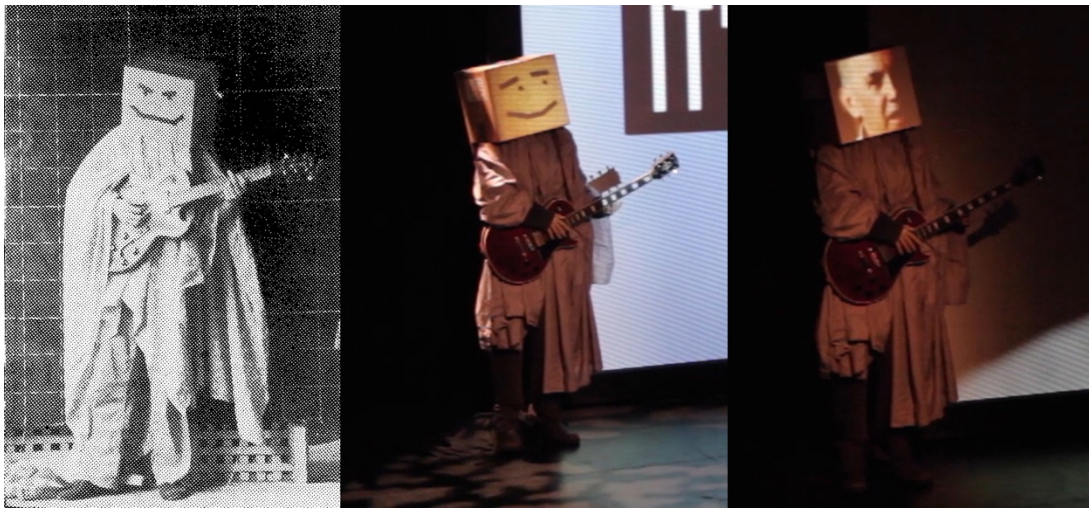

Fig. 8 - Swell Guys cover by Gary Warner, 1980. Boxhead, 2015.

THE IMAGES

Photographs are the visual heart of this project. Among the nearly 600 that were used in *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity*, Paul O'Brien's black and white shots of the scene play the lead role, Gary Warner's Polaroids (see Fig. 9) of his time in New Farm are a beautiful adjunct to his Super 8 films, and Peter Fischmann's city streets and train stations supply much-needed context to the broader story. Photographs from my own family/band collection also have a significant place in the entry into most of the chapters.

Once the script was written, it was a performative necessity that certain aspects of imagery were consistent across the time spent onstage. This necessity is one example of how a creative/reflective cycle was employed in the curation/performance nexus. A photograph triggers a small flood of writing, the text suggests adjacent concepts, and more images are sought to support this suggestion. This cycle played out time and again across the project. Once the script was written and set, changes continued to be made to the media content right up to the day before the performances in relation to how the thing *played*, how well the images and the narrative voice were talking to one another and how *right* it was for the story. This *rightness*, which appeared to be an instinctual response, was actually informed by many years of acquired skill in story-telling across disciplines and an empathetic relationship with the subject matter.

Fig. 9 - Polaroids by Gary Warner

"The photographs invoke the people, the places, the moment in time, but the [stories] give them flesh and feeling, remake the time alive with voices and laughter, the sorrow of loss and missed opportunity. These stories are now bound to the photographs, the [past] has been rebuilt and reborn, it is as clear as day. The smell of boxed wine, coloured cigarettes,

wet traffic and the night . . . the rare, breathless moments when the city goes quiet, and the relentless midnight energy of the young. Energy that comes whistling up from the past, out of a box of photographs, shoots past in a spray of sparks and smoke, and lights up [the] night" (Willsteed 2011).

THE MOVIES

The first presentation I made in early 2010 to my fellow PhD coursework students used Gary Warner's Super 8 footage, shot over a few years in New Farm from 1978. They were beautiful images: saturated with colour and movement and life. One of my fellow students approached me after the talk, and pointed me towards Merilee Bennett's *A Song of Air*, made in 1987. This award-winning short film, an exploration of a very particular father/daughter relationship, was edited from 16mm films devised and shot by her father through the 60s and 70s in Brisbane. Merilee, once found, was happy to supply me with hours of her father's footage, some of which was used as contextual layers in *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity.* His films are a unique vision of those times.

Peter Macpherson's *A Vision of Hell* was also utilised in that, like Warner's, it shows the scene at play, but it also featured live and rehearsal room footage and is more 'musical' in its focus. These film/video elements play many different roles. Some take centre stage, the voice in the video speaking directly to us, like the interviews, or the clip from the *Exposure* music tv pilot from 1980; some used as background for new/old music; others frame the photos, forced slow and out of focus, relegated to texture. The footage is used in the same way the music and the photographs are - as a way of bleeding across disciplinary boundaries and as an essential element in a complex curatorial performance. Pierre Huyghe, the re-constructionist, interviewed by Amelia Barikin in 2005, sees the possibility of this sort of art: ". . . It is through the montage, the way we combine and relate images, that we can create a representation of an event that is perhaps more precise than the event itself" (Barikin 2012, 5). The constant movement sets up a contrast with the static nature of the stage and the audience. It draws attention using the messiness and the DIY aesthetic and the blend of

collage and montage in the media, into a space where the past is being constantly refreshed, revitalised and re-seen.

THE MUSIC

The show opens, in the dark, with sound. A summer dawn chorus in the Moololah Valley, with the occasional crow, lazy insects and the quiet trickle of the creek. Slowly, as the story steps across the map, the sound drifts into a distant summer storm, thunder rolling across low hills, the sound dying into the heat. Then the arrival of quiet music: a version of *This IS Stolen Property* by Harley Young.

Music is central to this time, this subculture, my life and this project. First and foremost, above all else, I am a musician. I love it and I make it. I'm listening to it right now, as I write.[21] Making *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* gave me both permission and opportunity to sift through music that hadn't been heard for years, and to construct a live mixtape of pieces whose meaning was realised in the performance. The *Ghost Wash* performance in 2012 gave me an experience to draw from - I had used a couple of 'well-known' tracks in order to anchor the story.[22] But the themes rising in this project called for a slightly different approach to the music choices. Just as it was essential to the integrity of the story that we see faces of people from the scene who weren't necessarily in bands, I wanted to use songs that weren't famous, songs that had no cultural baggage. I wanted to try to get to the heart of the scene by sidestepping the story already told by the media and academia, by slipping into the gaps and liminal spaces.

I chose tracks from bands who were well-known to the scene, but barely known to the world at large. The songs were by my band (Xero) and my friends' bands (The Leftovers, Antic Frantic, The Hostages, The Apartments, Tangled Shoelaces, Perfect Strangers, Wondrous Fair). The songs needed to make a connection and a contribution to the text, both the narrated words and the larger holistic story being performed. I also chose, rather than simply performing these songs with guitar and voice, to blend them more completely into

[21] If you're interested: Karl Blau, Midlake, Glenn Campbell, First Aid Kit.
[22] Famous in a Brisbane way: Railroad Gin's *A Matter of Time*, the Go-Betweens *Karen*.

the other aspects of the performance. This was a conscious decision to use my hands – the hands of a guitarist - in the telling, not just my voice. “After all, storytelling, in its sensory aspect, is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling the hand plays a part which supports what is expressed in a hundred ways with its gestures trained by work” (Benjamin 1968, 108). I played old recordings as soundtracks to compiled slideshows of photographs, I played along with recorded work, and I played and sang other people’s songs in a very simple way. I used those hours deep in the dark of night - sick of words and images - to construct, with much pleasure, instrumental backing tracks for me to play and sing with. I blended these backings with old recordings so I could seamlessly segue the live and recorded, and tie the present and the past together in the moment of performance.

Referring to the world of radio/television documentary and the beautiful work of Roman Mars,[23] and extending my own experience in this craft, I wrote new pieces as well as adapting existing Brisbane songs into instrumentals to sit under the monologues - songs by The Swell Guys, Harley Young, and Gary Warner. Using music in this way created a critical, curatorial opportunity, giving permission to amend the scripts in response to the musicality of the performance. These pieces underpin some of the most effective moments in *It’s Not The Heat, It’s The Humidity.* The juxtaposition of voice and instrumental music created a mood that then coloured the script - the choice of words, the intonation, the tempo. These aesthetic decisions were being made in the charged space where the curatorial and the performative entwined.

THE TITLES

In an echo from the past, and as part of an attempt to evoke the aesthetic of the times, I constructed the title slides using a method we employed in the early 80s. The hand lettering was made with pencil or pen on paper, as small as I could comfortably write - possibly 2 or 3mm - then decayed in the photocopier through multiple iterations and blown up to size (See Fig. 10), using Photoshop to emulate the photocopy process. The results were colour

[23] https://www.ted.com/talks/roman_mars_why_city_flags_may_be_the_worst_designed_thing_you_ve_never_noticed?language=en#t-930242

inverted and centred on the slides. The title slides functioned to punctuate the story, to reinforce the DIY aesthetic, to provide a relief to the eyes in the dissolve back to darkness. Each slide was a signpost, a song, a direction, an idea - another track on the concept album, being performed live for the first time.

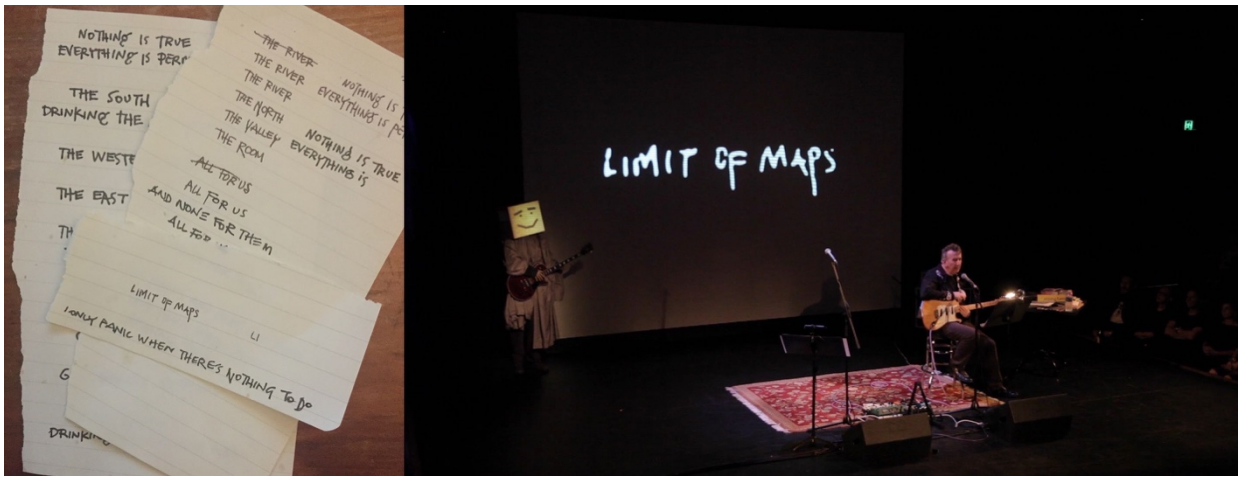

Fig. 10 – Titles at work

THE MAPS

The first act for me onstage, the first gesture: I walk to a table of printed artefacts - books, pamphlets, maps, diaries - and open a map from the 1980s. It uses black lines of varying thicknesses and neat hand-lettering to lay out the Cooloolah coast, from Sunshine to Rainbow: beaches both, and beautiful. But it does far more. It represents the road, the highway, leaving and returning. It represents family and memory and school holidays. “It is a ritual generations old: we load up the car, we hit the highway, we head north. All cares recede, the afternoon spreads out and disappears, time slows down – to head north from here is to leave many indicators of civilization behind. We enter an unknown, a blurry future” (Willsteed 2010). Conquergood sees the map as full of potential, as a “symbol of transgressive travel between two different domains of knowledge: one official, objective, and abstract—“the map”; the other one practical, embodied, and popular—“the story.” This promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing carries the most radical promise . . .” (Conquergood 2002, 145).

In the late 1970s, heading into the city also required a map, or in this case, street directory - a Refidex. The city itself has always been a character in this project: the weather, the river, the hills, the houses and streets, and this was realised by the use of both manipulated google maps and street maps as a graphic element in each chapter, often setting the scene under each opening paragraph. The street maps were scanned from a 1970 Refidex, then Photoshopped to look photocopied. (See Fig. 11)

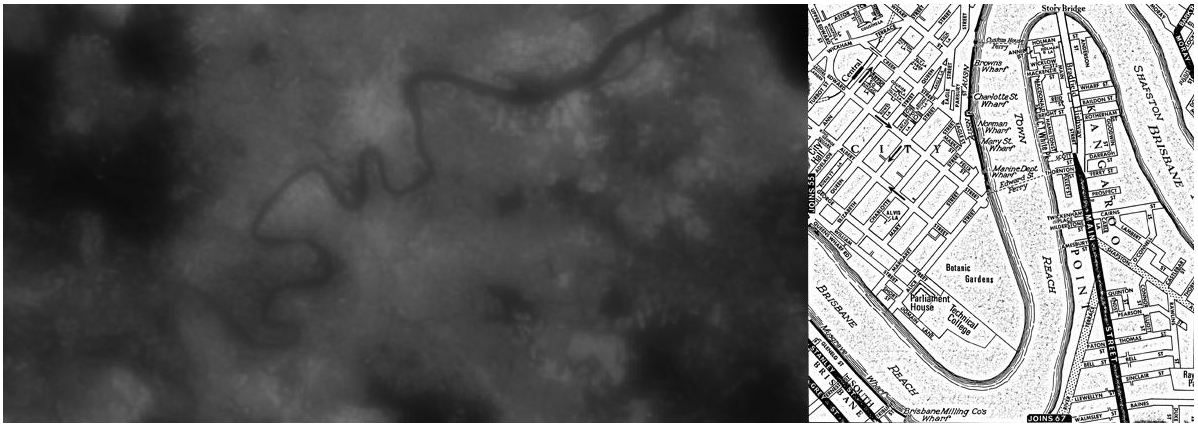

Fig. 11 – Maps by Google and Refidex

The map is a central concept in any exploration of the past, just as the landscape, the physical and geographical, is essential to our identity. Antonio Arantes, the Brazilian anthropologist proposes that “landscapes are recognized as relevant identity icons, as the basis of claims to territorial rights and protection from unplanned economic growth and as economic assets” (Arantes 2007, 296). It is important to us as a culture, and central to the story that I was telling. We started this story on the map, and the stories are framed, but not constrained, by it - stories of the streetscapes, the river, the weather and the night - “. . . what the map cuts up, the story cuts across” (Certeau and Rendall 1984, 129).

PERFORMANCE - CONCLUSION

The objective of the creative work was to develop the story of the Brisbane punk/post-punk scene into a narrative that reflects the richness and depth of this time and place as it exists both in my memory and in the evidence of discarded materials. This richness can best be expressed by seeing faces and places and things; hearing voices and music and sounds; borrowing from and extending the aesthetic of the times: " the messiness, the tenderness, the family histories mapped to the city"[24] VB. The original material here, the ephemera, was from a period when punk was a way of life, a music genre, a style. And DIY was a way of describing the inventiveness around process which necessity had spawned. Nearly forty years later, there is an unexpected value in the invoking of this process, in that it "deepen[s] experiential and participatory engagement with materials both for the researcher and her audience" (Conquergood 2002, 152). By connecting the content and the design in this way, and incorporating it in the dissemination of the curated work, we are creating an example of what Ranjit Makkuni called "expressive information delivery devices" (Makkuni 2010, 221). *It's Not The Heat It's The Humidity* is a working example of the performed curatorial, what one of my students described as 'performing the archive.'

In teasing apart the elements of the performance in this chapter, I have illuminated how the theory shaped my creative practice, not only as an artist, filmmaker and musician, but more broadly as a performer. How the curation and the performance played against and around one another, to "deepen experiential and participatory engagement" in a way that is "dynamic and rhetorically compelling"(Conquergood 2002, 152). By making this a performed curatorial process, the history has been transformed. It has passed from the hands of the participants and into the institution, where it has lingered and gathered layers of significance. "These moments of public retelling keep historical memory alive beyond the confines of a written text and help historians and our students advance new narratives and new knowledge about the past" (Fousekis 2005b).@178). But it has now been returned to the community, in the hands of one of their own, and retold in the language of the tribe.

[24] See Appendix 2b

“The ultimate performance for a historian is truthfulness.”

(Dening 2002, 22)

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSION

FUTURE RESEARCH

Hannah Arendt calls history "the great story without beginning or end" (Arendt 1998, 184). I feel that this project has started me on a long path; that I have, to some extent, found a new career, and I see a number of possibilities arising from *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity.* The most obvious is to continue to perform this show. Each time the performance is staged, different relationships are formed between different audiences and the particular cultural history presented. The second iteration was performed in late August 2016 at *Createx*, a large, public multidisciplinary event to celebrate the opening of QUT's new Creative Industries Precinct 2. This version was smaller and neater than the first, and equally well received.

In late September 2016 I will be delivering a keynote address to the International Association of Music Librarians at the State Library of Queensland. This address will discuss new ways of engaging the public with the collections using artists as curators/presenters, with *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* being deconstructed as an example. Recently winning the inaugural *Letty Katts Award* at the State Library's *Queensland Memory Awards* will also give me the opportunity, over summer, to research a particular aspect of Brisbane music history: band and venue posters from 1975-1995. The delivery of a public outcome in July 2017 will entail developing another curatorial public performance in conjunction with the Queensland Music Festival.

I have begun the process of applying for funding to develop a method of community engagement with cultural history. This will begin with a pilot project in December undertaken with the Queensland Department of Land and Heritage Protection. The funding for this pilot has already been attained. Once the pilot has been successfully completed, we

will be applying for an ARC Linkage grant. The idea has already attracted serious interest from industry, government and community groups.

Before I staged the show in October 2015, I was approached by a commercial publisher with an interest in developing *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* into a book. Initial discussions are very positive, though it will be a very different proposition than the original written idea for this project. It will be a picture book, a book of reproduced ephemera, with the script from the live show as it's textual core. I was then approached by a second publisher interested in publishing a book of Paul O'Brien's photographs, curated and with essays by me and Robert Forster.

CONCLUSION

It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity set out to make use of my connection to a time and a place and a culture - and my practice as a musician and filmmaker - to develop a new way to make a personal history of the Brisbane punk and post-punk scene. Using recently acquired knowledge about curatorial practice and performance, particularly the personal narrative, I devised a performance to facilitate the making of this new history. The success of this project hinged on the audience's readiness to engage with the story, and their willingness to enter the compact with the performer. It was a story made of the relationship developed in the performance, between audience and performer, music and text, ephemera and style, past and present, and was as honest and rich a history as I could have hoped for.

The project was an example of the value of the extended curatorial: how the public, through social media can add value to objects collected and protected by institutions, that are then mediated by someone with an inside knowledge of the culture. Add to this the very real advantage when this curator is an artist, and able to bring both expertise and creativity to bear on the dissemination of the history. But the innovation in this case is the use of performance (and particularly the artist as performer) to present the curated story. The performed curation makes powerful connections on emotional, cultural and intellectual

levels. The sophistication of this interplay between history and public, between story and people, is hard to imagine in other contexts, and was commented on in the show feedback: "a polished and immersive theatrical performance monologue. It was testimonial theatre, produced in the calibre of a William Yang monologue" PA.[25] This, then, is a model for any institution, anywhere, to engage with sub/pop/counterculture artefacts that live in their collections. It is a simple series of steps for the institution:

- Find artists who have a connection to the artefacts
- Facilitate the use and expansion of the archive
- Allow the artist to develop a curatorial method appropriate to the collection
- Facilitate the public performance of the archive

When we speak of the 'artist as curator' we acknowledge that "*to curate* has shifted towards further participation in the production of meaning" (Pierce 2016, last par). In the world of the visual arts, the galleries, and the 'exhibition as art', we see "the autonomous curator functioning in some form of artistic capacity" and the "artist who temporarily performs in a curatorial capacity" (Doubtfire and Ranchetti 2015, par 4), but discussion around this seems to be centred on the shifting of gaze from the object to the exhibition, the idea of the exhibition as a medium, and the notion of provocation or experimentation in curatorial decisions. I'd like to suggest that the movement of this concept onto the stage and away from the gallery is a significant one, and one which renders *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* unique. "Most people can only achieve that sort of things with words and music. Willsteed achieved it using the stuff of his life and times. And he sang. It was truly a beautiful thing to see" PG.[26] The show and how it was received very clearly illuminated the contribution that performance can make to the curation of cultural history. The style of performance is dependent on the artist, but the depth of connection and high-level creative skills will drive the appropriate response to the archive.

In mid 2013, I appeared on a panel discussion with TV presenter Annette Shun Wah and designer Alison Page. The podcast, *Living Contemporary Culture*, was part of a GoMA Talks

[25] See Appendix 2B
[26] See Appendix 2B

series, broadcast on Radio National (ABC 2013). In the discussion, there was much talk about the culture that both these women came from - in Annette's case, Chinese Australians; in Alison's, Indigenous Australians. As the middle-class, white, male, Anglo/Celt in between the two, I was struggling to articulate where I came from. It was only in ruminating on my research while talk was going on around me that I realised that I *did* have a tribe. It was those people from the punk scene in Brisbane in the late 70s. Their culture was mine, their history was mine. Their story was mine to tell. One of the *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* audience members noted in a Facebook comment after the shows, that he was impressed with the "insistence on allowing most of what he shared to speak for itself, and the respectful way in which he treated a subject that is precious to those of us who were a part of this scene."[27]

The final advantage of conducting this work, in this way, is that the context is constantly, subtly being expressed through the text, the curation and the performance. The narrative itself - my life, my past, my connection to the objects and the story - is the context. It embodies significance and relevance, and opens the door to more stories drawn from my life. Perhaps more importantly, it illuminates a path for others to travel, where artistic skills acquired over many years and connections to the past can be channelled through personal experience into crafting honest, meaningful, and engaging, cultural histories.

> "Each generation rediscovers and reexamines that part of its past that gives its present new meaning, new possibility and new power. The question becomes . . . what will we choose as our inspiration? Which distant events and long dead figures will provide us with the greatest help, the most coherent context and the wisdom to go forward?
> This is in part an existential question. None of us gets out of here alive."
>
> Ken Burns
>
> Stanford Graduating Address, 12/6/2016[28]

[27] See Appendix 2B
[28] http://news.stanford.edu/2016/06/12/prepared-text-2016-stanford-commencement-address-ken-burns/

APPENDIX 1

It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity

NORTHSIDE

CH 1 - THE RIVER

The river divides the town.

Far to the northwest, maybe three hours drive, between steep, velvet hillsides thick with rainforest and eucalypt, the river rises, clear and sweet. It races noisily through gullies; slows and swirls into swimming holes; slides under bridges and empties into dams, and spreads wide through farmlands, before dropping down to the coastal plain and the looming town.

Somewhere deep in the western suburbs it meets the tidal drift from the sea, the waters entwine and the momentum dissolves - at times it seems barely a river at all. Brown and wide and slow, it slides quietly between the cliffs and towers of the city and curls around to meet the fringe of mangroves on Moreton Bay with a languid yawn.

The weather and the land are powerful elements in Brisbane's image of itself. The long, turbulent summers; tiny winters framed by the dry westerlies that drive through the Ekka, spreading colds and bad moods from carnies and countryfolk to gormless suburban slobs.

And nestled at the blurred edges of summer: spring and autumn. One fragrant and bird-filled, the other quiet, slow, warm and waiting.

Occasionally, in mid-summer, a cyclone, blandly named (Pam, Yvonne, Alan), edges down from the tropics, marries the king tides, and spawns a broiling impression of a river – the creeks swell and creep into backyards and under houses. Water subsides, and the blinding sun re-appears, baking the mud and setting a lingering smell.

It is, with no doubt, a boring place to grow up. Diversions and adventures are small and seized with passion –
Suburban pool halls.
Pinball machines up the back of take-away food shops.
Smoking, anywhere.
Making noise.

CH 2 - THE NORTH

I am of the north.

“Sandgate/Shorncliffe train stopping all stations except Bindha!”

I was born at the Royal Women’s at the end of summer, early in 1957, on a Wednesday – and thus, a child full of woe. Or merry, or kind, or sour. The fourth of five. We drove, no seatbelts, no airbags, back to our little house in Geebung. Geebung. Oh, how it trips off the tongue!

Geebung.
Gateway to Zillmere.

The north is in my blood. My mum grew up in Nundah and went to school in The Valley. Summer afternoons in the late 30s – carried home by that Sandgate train, rattling and hot and smelly. She felt the sea-breeze cooling her skin as the carriages swerved out from behind the hills of Ascot and Hamilton and into Eagle Junction station, the start of flatlands

that stretch up to the Hornibrook Bridge. That same sea-breeze that we all ache for through summer.

Geebung eventually drifted into our past as we moved “uptown” to Kedron, but we would, regularly and for many years, wind our way up Sandgate Road past Su’s Corner and through the delights of Deagon, past the Lagoon and the Masonic monolith and on to my grandparents place in Queens Parade. This sullen teen, muttering as he mowed the stupidly big Brighton yard, when just a few streets away, past the smokin’ bodgies in their smokin’ Valiants . . .

From down here, from the end of the line; from the Avenues and Parades; reared on the waters of swamp and bay and estuary, came The Leftovers. They reflected what people seemed to feel about them: The Fucken Leftovers Hate You!

Warren Lamond, that charming man - skinny pants, pointy boots, following the unspoken obligation to dress dark - a great match for Ed Wreckage and his rangy, Eastern European intensity and grinding right hand.

Warren really came from the “mansions” of Boondall, but the rest of the band – Ed and Hutchie and Jim and Glen Smith - grew up in the same tiny patch – in a little cluster of streets up here by the bay.

There were other Leftovers: including two who would become dear to me, Michael Hiron and Johnny Gorman, whose roots were indeterminate – Gaythorne, Alderley, Kedron and finally Hamilton. They were brothers, alike in temperament and musical brilliance and as different as their different surnames.

But the boredom, the torpor, were as palpable out here in Nashville on a Saturday night as they were in North Quay or Norman Park. Monique Nicholson, climbing out the bedroom window into the suburban Carina night, calls it “a forever of inertness”. The Leftovers developed a response - (I Only Panic When There’s Nothing To Do).

By 1977's end, it would be fair to say that the punk thing had passed me by. I was lost in a world of soft cotton, leather sandals, lengthy hair and the communal garden.

But that summer, in our share house in Kelvin Grove, Stevie P introduced me to Malcolm Skewis.

Mal was from Chinchilla. He was a painter, a guitarist, and, according to The Courier Mail, at the centre of the Brisbane punk scene – "kids with nothing to do, and endless time to do it in." We drank vodka, we listened to Patti Smith, we smashed a couple of things. In about a minute I moved to the Pink Palace with the patient Watkins sisters, and became a kind of hybrid for a while – a terrible blend of hippy and punk.

The Palace was filled with difference, and was, importantly, next door to The City View and it's insecure bottleshop. And Spring Hill was swimming with street life. I met my first junkies, up from Melbourne and vainly hoping the geographical would work.

Winter in 1978 was "new wave" music at The Queens Hotel with Beryl Vetier on the door, Freddo's out at the Uni with Tony Blake's nachos and cheap acid, and, at the bottom of the hill, the big town!

Elizabeth Arcade was deep in the heart of the wood. The Arcade provided sustenance to a starving population – The Red and Black Bookshop for excellent propaganda and the possibility of running into Murtek, The Source for lentil burgers or The Tortilla for the straights. Gary Warner and Adam Wolter's Aleph - food for the mind's eye.

The music came from Discreet Import Records.

Like Warwick at Rocking Horse round in Adelaide Street, Phil and Mary created homes for the bored. Lovely new imports, wrapped in plastic. Oddities, rarities, with lurid covers or subtle, minimal type on pale fields. Covers as varied, as delectable, as transporting, and as tied to their time as these polaroids are. Punk and new wave, prog and no wave. Jazz. An

ocean of stuff to listen to, to talk about, to share. Hands meet on a copy of 77 – eyes, drawn by the red of the cover, turn to each other - bands start, love begins.

CH 3 - THE VALLEY

Gary Warner points through the windscreen, highlighting a dark figure hunched against the rain, leather jacket and a trail of cigarette smoke as it crosses Edward Street – “Look, it’s Johnny Burnaway!”

What a name - what a look!

By the end of 1978, I had moved into a share house at the arse end of Harcourt Street in New Farm. Warner lived there. And then Johnny Burnaway moved in. We were down near the abandoned woolstores of Tenneriffe, in a house of lazy production - cheque day drinking - front room music. We go out at night – The Curry Shop, Joint Efforts at the Uni, the long walk home along silent streets, coats against the winter chill or breathless in the dense humidity.

Gary hacked my hair off, while Johnny played his detuned Hagstrom in the front bedroom and Michael played drums. Ideas for tunes that would surface nearly ten years later: tunes I would play when I joined The Plug Uglies after Johnny’s death.

I was gathered into a new family: Adam Wolter, Clare McKenna, Terry Murphy, Judy Pfitzner, Mark Halstead, Julie Moran, Beryl and Madonna. Chaos was both a theory and a reality. In Hill End, a stolen canoe balanced over heads, late winter dark, four of us heading for St Lucia, dumped in the stinking river, revived naked and vodka’d in David Darling’s sauna.

David had turned Triple Zed into a humming live music engine – those Joint Efforts were legendary. He also commissioned our first poster, me scribbling notes on a scrap of paper in the phonebox up on Kent Street, Gaz and me with scalpels and ink and the ever-present photocopies.

Many years later, Gary swings past Harcourt Street in a cab, between airport and family, to find the house in flames, fire engines, locals in pyjamas, reflections flashing on the rear window as he peels away from the past.

But in it’s day - in our days and nights - it was a little factory: posters, clothes, handbills, movies, our first magazine – DK – mailed out to mail-art buddies in fresh A4 envelopes. Businesslike. Substantial and satisfying.

At the northern end of the street were the railway tracks and wharves, a daytime playground, a place to film - quiet and baking in the sun, the smell of lanolin and spent labour. But if you head south, the Valley is alive. Lucky’s, Sala’s, Giardinetto, The Eiffel Tower, The El Dorado - breakfasts at The California Café. There are practice rooms and nightclubs. And we feel safe - among the winos, the drag queens, the strippers. We are at home here.

CH 4 - THE ROOM

I joined a band. I don’t know how or why. But I was playing bass. That was new!

It was summer, well into it, and we practiced in a big house filled with women. Women from New Zealand: Heather, who wore a space suit, Helen and Vik, who was Nikki then. Nikki Nought. Lindy, Deborah Zero, Irena Zero. I became Johnny Zero.

This house loomed near the crest of Normanby hill, splitting the white sky, humming with exuberance and hormones. The band helped pay the rent. Nearby, the Normanby Hotel and chilled McWilliams Royal Reserve Port. With a little Schweppes Lemonade, it was a sweet and wholesome summer drink. It took the edge off the blistering afternoons, and misted the evenings with promise. We walked the streets between the houses, from the hill, along the ridges to our home down near the river.

By the end of 1979, after an incident at the RE, Nikki Nought was told to leave town by the cops, and then Deb was gone too. Michael O'Connell from The Apartments joined in, and we rented some rooms in the old Smith and Patterson Building in The Valley.

It had light and spaces to work. We danced and sang and started writing songs. Our own songs. It was our day job. We planned and played shows in halls and houses. Lunchtime refec shows in crippling February heat. And just around the corner, thanks to John Reid, Romeos and Pinnochio's - local bands, weird Super 8 movies - outsider art from the belly of the beast.

We shared the building and the Valley gigs with The Swell Guys, The Sharks, The Gasmen. As the band became a focus in our lives, so the room became a hub of activity. Posters, shirts, graffiti, the little mags, these movies. And lots of audio recording – organized, layered, experimental – as long as we could afford tape, we were busy.

Nearby were other rooms, other bands and other gigs. Lots of musicians - Michelle Andringa, Jane Oliver, Peter Morgan, Andrew Wilson, Keryn Henry. Then David Darling opened up The Silver Dollar and bands from over the border started coming to the Valley. And every time a band played there was a gathering of the tribe. Familiar faces started to fill the centre of the scene: students, artists, public servants, musicians, the unemployed. Filling the scene just as their faces fill these photographs.

CH 5 - ALL FOR US AND NONE FOR THEM

I had moved into Iréna's home in Dutton Park. I know – the Southside.

Sativa and Jonas, her beautiful children - Lithuanian grandparents, homework and me, the strange guy downstairs with the tape machine and the synthesizers who lived on ice-blocks. It was a social time, if a little dark. Gin and tonics in the plastic pool, V2 and Mal, Neil Plover, thirteen cats , Matt McGrory, Steven Grainger, Adam and Tony Childs. Aidan and Marcella,

Sue McLaren, Martin Boscott's thunderous homemade fireworks that drew unwanted official interest.

Back in New Farm, we had good company. The house at 88 Moray Street was sliced from one into seven – it was shabby and massive. From 1978 to 1982 - a relentless, mind-bending experiment. Ed Wreckage and Tracy who had Ché and then Django, Adam Wolter, Linda Sproule, Mark Purchess and Rhonda Cavell, Gary and Stevie P, Donts, Marko, Kym Larsen and Jane Johnston and Johnny Mitting, Sue Welsh and John Downie, Beryl and David and Sparky, Lynn and Cyril. It becomes the home of DK House Films Inc, and a line of printed curiosities is released.

In the middle of a warm afternoon in 1978, some of us gather against a tall, wide, wall in Oxley Lane, behind the Village Twin. Arms dropped over shoulders, flesh against flesh in the slanting sun, milling and smiling. A little tribe, a little bit of a tribe, marked by our common desires: to be together, to make stuff together, to step away from the blandness and dumbness and thoughtlessness out there. Out there in Bracken Ridge, and Carole Park and Goodna.

We'd graffitti the cinema wall on Barker Street, obscurities and inanities, over and over again. We paint, they paint, we paint. A rhythmic, lyrical game – the winners? Maybe the mixed bag that glides past on the 178, down Brunswick Street towards the Park, the ferry, the south.

We take over the spaces we're playing in. Plastering the halls with words and images and projections, devising backdrops and dramas. There is almost no barrier between band and audience – our boredom is theirs, our fun is theirs, we are as often the audience as we are the entertainment.

In the winter of 1980 we dress up the old United Brothers Lodge in Caxton Street – Baroona Hall. Monochrome set. Two-tone. Cut-ups courtesy of Gysin and Burroughs. The laboratory of dreams. From the loft, buckets of paint fly down wires to explode on a portrait of

Petersen hogging the stage, Colin Bloxsom bursts through the picture - the night ends in the customary chaos and cops.

CH 6 - NOTHING IS TRUE, EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED

I was fond of William Burroughs in my mid teens. The books were windows to a place with no rules – the Badlands of the imagination. In the years that followed, that interest grew.

I remember well the first time. Like all first times it burns deep and sharp. Detail still remains even after thousands more times - even after long decades, with memories beginning to lose shape and lustre.

Heroin brings a soothing darkness, and a welcome warmth. For some, it can be deadly. Accidents are common, as judgement blurs and fades.

The factory under Irena's house at Dutton Park is quieter, slower and less social, but it remains very productive. Xero record and play a lot through the next couple of years. Dreams, like those of the rarebit fiend, become a creative staple. A collective is formed and a new style of magazine package is born - Zip Start is the first in a series that combine our love of Raw, Metal Hurlant, Re-Search, Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire. Neatness and chaos.

Two of the ZIP members, Terry Murphy and Matt Mawson, had been busy for years designing stuff for the Student Union and 4ZZZ. They delivered the look of those times. Terry's posters, in particular, tell the big story. Winter nights over the screens, or in the dark room, cigarette ash and thinners, racing home in the Datsun before dawn. The fruits of this toil, drying on the racks, to end up wrapped around a pole, torn off, rolled up, unfurled and tacked onto share house kitchen toungue-and-groove in West End and New Farm and Spring Hill.

In late 82, we move the band into Red Comb House up in Roma Street. This end of town has always been groovy, ever since the Curry Shop, where Johnny Burnaway wrapped himself in butcher's paper and ignited. It's also only a few doors from Basement Studio where we recorded our only vinyl release.

And we make newer, younger, friends, adding layer to layer and passing on something – caution? trust? - mostly a sense of the importance of the absurd and the value of local culture. And to be part of the longer, deeper tale.

There are many characters in this story. One of my favourites lingers for this vision: I see her, in a dense summer afternoon, crossing the desert of King George Square. She is wearing what look like papal robes, funereal red with outrageous gold brocade edging. The giant hood obscures her face and the robes billow out behind her as she strides across the city. By this point she has changed her name: she is Qwint America. When we first met, she was Julie.

As I write this little chapter on a Sunday night September 27, I hear that Julie Moran died this afternoon. Her good friend Steven Grainger let us know. He tries to make an essence of her: "She was tested like few ever are and her goodness and purity were never diminished. A great artist she was."

And she was.

SOUTHSIDE

CH 7 - THE SOUTH: DRINKING THE MORNING AIR

In the 1970s, the river's dredged brown surface was netted with the wake of ferries and pleasure craft, Northside and Southside were bound together by the bridges. Bridges named after royalty or long-gone men, builders and public servants: William Jolley, Walter Taylor, John Story.

My father bought a second-hand Morris Oxford in 1960, NBY400, a blue, lumpy thing, and we sat three in the front, four in the back. Always one or two on the floor, drifting off in the monoxide haze. We had crossed the river to visit the paternal grandparents. Jim was blind, little, accented. My grandmother – formidable.

Cruising back along the endless stretch of Wynnum Road, we reach the Story Bridge, motion sickness overwhelms me and my dad, another Jim, sits me on the curb, head between my knees, as the tide of Sunday afternoon traffic washes past, the bridge trembling with each truck and bus.

It was the southern reaches of the river - with names like Quarantine Flats and Humbug – which opened to the wide sweep of new suburbs: bigger houses; newer people from the migrant camp at Wacol. My dad worked in a place like this, not here, but in Canberra, in the late 40s. The stories he heard, in the Office of Displaced People, haunted him through his days. But soon, people began arriving who were choosing this new life rather than fleeing into it, and the southern suburbs had room for all.

Most of us were born into this, but some were not.

Coming over Chardon's Corner, the choice lies ahead: Beaudesert Road? Or Ipswich Road? I get this same sense of dire choice at the horrible nexus of Stafford Road and Gympie Road. And like these choices, suburban childhoods back then were as dire in Browns Plains as in Bracken Ridge, the boredom was fertile ground for some wild children.

CH 8 - THE WESTERN LINE

More than a decade ago, Jess St Bruno laid out her plan for a documentary about the Brisbane punk scene. It was an elegant, inventive thing. It started like this:

"A hot Queensland sunrise. Train tracks lead straight out to nowhere on a flat barren vanishing point. Heatwaves shimmer on the distant horizon . . . A faint echo of train wheels can be heard beating out a rhythm on the tracks."

I didn't quite get the concept of trains. I think the trams, like Jesuits, had stolen my mind when I was very young, and set me against those thundering red beasts on the rails, with their difficult window arrangements and tricky handles. We lived, not at the end of the line, but at the terminus - this elegant use of the Latin, to match the elegance of the trams.

But to travel to and from the west, you needed the trains.

Visiting Sherwood always felt a little exotic when I was a kid. Over the Walter Taylor, the toll-booth, washing on the line, past the sedate glory and award-winning gardens, the gentle green of Chelmer, Graceville, Sherwood.

My mum's sister Arline, "Dorsey", lived in Borden Street, spectacular fudge and coconut ice, in a house painted with sump oil to ward off the demons of insect and weather – there were fruit trees, a tennis court, a piano! She plugged the pipe into the wrong end of the vacuum cleaner, clouds of dust billow out into the room - earned her nickname.

Further down the line, beyond Graceville and the markets, and the carriages tethered at Redbank - fed and watered - past names that invoke the dread thought of incarceration: Goodna, Wacol, Wolston Park – here is Ipswich. The whole point of Ipswich Road. It's too far here to even bother with trains. Cars were the deal. Fast cars, Christian youth groups, and bands – limited options for boredom relief in the 70s.

There are always a bunch of brothers somewhere in these stories. Bremer High spat out the Howe brothers Noel and Cameron and their buddy John Spresser. With Ian Davies and Shaun McGrath they created Toy Watches, mined a thick vein of neat pop songs and eventually collapsed leaving in their wake Pinups, Party Ice and eventually The Skeletones. It's a form of heritage trail.

Kids from the west piled onto the trains, or got their folks to drive them down. Toy Watches first gig in the big city was at Sally's at Wooloongabba.

Sally's, The Curry Shop, Pinnochio's, Romeo's, The Silver Dollar. Strange rooms, strange vibes. Compulsory food - a sometimes life-saving spag bol – was a requirement of the licence. Kind of smelly, like all venues, but different. The pubs always had another life - a day job - but the clubs? This was their only outfit, and they wore it well. The valley clubs were owned by famous families, but Sally at The Gabba and Harley West in George Street created vital hideaways in dark times. No security. It wasn't necessary.

But look, after a ruckus at the 279 Club in the Exchange Hotel in town – a boycott!! The truth is, I was probably back in the ladies lounge the following week, propping up a small formica table. But for a minute there, we thought we held the world in our hands.

CH 9 - THE EAST

My formidable grandmother's sister, Theresa O'Flynn, lived down near Norman Creek. She was a single lady, a housekeeper for the catholic clergy, had an outrageously faux-irish brogue, and played fluttering piano that kept her tremulous singing voice company. There

were vicious magpies in the park over the back fence. A bird draws blood - Arnott's Orange Slice biscuits are an effective tourniquet.

In the floods, she was a refugee. I see my dad clearly: he hunches over the wheel in the Renault 12, peers through the watery world, heading for Coorparoo and the old woman, large black purse clutched tight to her chest. It is my job, oldest male son still at home, brother probably trapped by floodwaters in the hippy commune up at Yandina, to help her upstairs. It is the beginning of my last year at school - I am as uncomfortable around people as I probably ever will be. She trips, falls, there is blood as face and concrete meet. It mortifies me still.

Iain, Dave and Peter McPherson moved up from the Gold Coast to Cavendish Road in 1976. They make a band, The Pits, with Greg Gilbert, working in the Drouyn Drums factory at Stones Corner. They soon collide with the Wadley brothers at Camp Hill High and a course, of sorts, is set.

Between them through the early and mid-80s they take some part of this post-punk Brisbane scene into their hands. A feature-length super8 live music film, multiple cassette releases. They recorded other bands, bought a PA, organized gigs. They made magazines so the cassettes didn't look lonely. And they made it seem casual and funny.

Tex Perkins and Michelle McIntyre ride the trains into town from Sandgate, gigs and shops and the beckoning world. Michelle wants to write, a fan of Ian Gray's x-change, so in the spirit of the times, they made their own - the annagramatic Ratsack. My favourite - Artcask.

Like currents in the river, the north and south coil into each other. The Wadleys hook up with Perkins, Marko, Cyril, Tex Deadly and The Dum-Dums are born, move to Sydney, and on and on it goes.

CH 10 - THE MAGIC MILE

A breezy, but manageable, afternoon on Weller's Hill, somewhere in 1979.

After some tinkering - aluminium tubes and tricky hubs and bits of primary coloured fabric – Adam's kite, scaleable tetrahedrons, is out at the end of its line. Reduced to a dot of colour in the blue.

Adam Wolter and Gary Warner went to school together. Yeronga High. Gary went to work at Channel 0 up on the mountain when he was 13. Sherry Wheeler, Sir Digby Diggory, Meano the Magician. But he came from Moorooka. Bargains, but no high school.

Moorooka - Magic Mile of Motors - forever entwined, thanks to some flared potted creative or some Willy Loman of a used-car salesman, weaving home from the Golf Club at Tennyson, the Parker nib leaving inkstains on his trembling fingers as he scrawls the words on the front page of the Tele – a searing note of inspiration in a hope-filled life.

Madonna Fabian and Mark Ungerer both came from here. The Childs family, all that dark hair, and intensity. I still remember the phone number of the house in Anson Street. They were in bands, made trouble, kept things lively.

And Pork.

Paul Newsome and Peter Firth. With help over time from Glenn Norman, Chris Irwin and other intruders, Pork dovetailed with Cubbyhouse, and produced mesmerizing, and confronting live shows, magazines, cassettes and a significant contribution to Brisbane style.

Chainsaw, pig's head, tools, an abundance of swearing. Falling, heckling. An antidote to the mainstream.

CH 11 - GAMES SPECIAL

The beginning of the end.

So they made a special beer. It signified some sort of maturing - like a 5 year old in long pants and a bow tie. We had no interest at all in their games, a ludicrous waste of money, but we were happy with the beer. It was stronger, and we were simple folk, with simple tastes.

With Matilda's winking eye haunting our dreams, the summer of 82 drew us in and held us close. There was a restlessness in the air - a tremor of change. Xero make friends with MSquared, a small but vital label in Surry Hills. They make beautiful things. The highway calls, we answer.

That summer, Irena left for Paris. The tide was turning. The Reels released This Guys In Love With You, and I started playing with Pork. Through those stretched out, aching evenings we crossed and uncrossed the river, looking for another party, another gig.

Hands crossed behind my neck, cushioned in the dark by a small lawn behind a hall in Milton, I am gathered up and soothed by the sound of the trains gliding past on their way to the west, before clambering up the back stairs into the dimly lit, wooden space. Newie, Booth, me and Mark Simmonds – "The most potent musician Australian jazz has seen" banging ladders with sticks, making strangeness from nothing. A story made of things.

Near year's end, they knock Cloudland down, push it off its stumps – like a cop with a drunken teen. Like they needed to show us what they thought of such frivolity as music and fun and sex. It was wearying.

CH 12 - LIMIT OF MAPS

There were places in Brisbane then: The Blunder, Swan Hill, Dorrington, Cribb Island, Landers Pocket, Mayne . . . they no longer exist, no longer appear on the maps.

These photos and films and posters – they are the stuff of maps. We turn our faces to peer into the past, and none of us sees clearly, or even the same terrain, but when we share stories and names and songs the sea breeze sweeps in, and the haze lifts and disappears.

Each picture that provokes comment, transforms sketch into firm line. With each scrap of footage that reveals how someone laughed or moved their hands, shading and names appear. There are wallpapers and furniture and signage that give detail and colour. The things - the song, the poster, the concert ticket, the handbill, the silly magazine, the polaroid - each thing evokes different stories. The object, the ephemeral artifact, is a prism, through which the stories combine to make white light – a real illumination of the darkening past.

And of all these many images, the most intoxicating of all is the face.

The arrangement of features, even if the name isn't close to hand, drags us back to a stinking afternoon in 1980, The Trans-Continental back bar in Roma Street, cold beer and cigarettes, the best jukebox in the city, feeling time slow down to nothing in the company of the tribe.

All these youthful faces. Faces like suns and stars and moons. Faces with stories and truths –- joys and pain and sorrow. Some are still here; some flung out into the world; some long gone into the dark with no returning. But we all carry something: we carry a mark, a way of looking at things – romantic and cynical – and it binds us to this time and these places, and to one another.

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 2a

Responses to early presentation *(Stage 2)*

May, 2010

An engaging, relaxed, compelling, entertaining and yet informative presentation with humour and immediacy . . .

The presentation performed the nature of the thesis in terms of a personally anchored history . . .

The blend of personal remembrance and theoretical reflection makes the presentation completely engaging, moving and convincing . . .

APPENDIX 2b

Responses to creative work:

It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity

at Brisbane Powerhouse, October 29 and 30, 2015

From Facebook:

Over the past two evenings, my old friend John Willsteed presented his impressions of a brief but intense period of creativity and resistance in the cultural and social life of late 70s/early 80s Brisbane. Through stories, images, sounds and artefacts, John took us on a

moving personal journey through a place and time that was integral to my growth as a human being and formation as an artist. While I would expect no less from John, I was impressed by the poetic beauty of his account, his insistence on allowing most of what he shared to speak for itself, and the respectful way in which he treated a subject that is precious to those of us who were a part of this scene. Of course, John was there and knows first hand that the creative expression of that scene extended beyond a few bands and even music itself, to many forms of the visual and performance arts and to the lives of all the people who contributed to the creation and sustenance of that culture. I laughed, cried, was reminded of the words of songs long forgotten,and was humbled and awed by hundreds of photographs of people who still figure in my life, familiar faces with forgotten names and loved ones who are no longer here. Thank you, John.

It was magnificent. The only possible improvement which Johnny also noted in hindsight last night, was if the show had not been split into 2 parts. People that did not attend both nights missed the full effect, but I think they were also powerful as standalone events.

Mal Skewis

It's not the heat, it's the humidity. Last night was a beautiful poetic glimpse into the world of John Willsteed who chats, reminisces, informs and performs while the images of visual artists such as Gary Warner are dancing with him and behind him.

Jude Kuepper

Hey johnnny love, thanks for last night, loved all about it, the messiness the tenderness the family histories mapped to the city, poetry... and you have a great voice for telling the stories. Such a time to grow wings. Lines of flight have been divergent but the growing done across those decades was profound.

Virginia Barratt

Via email:

It's always a tremendous pleasure to see one's students achieve great things. Of course it's a stretch to call Willsteed my student as he is close to unsupervisable and, in any case, my sole contribution has been secondary endorsement of any standard HDR forms needed to move things along. Regardless, I was as moved by anyone in the Visy Theatre last night as we witnessed what I can only describe as a performance of the most magnificently formed lyric, meant in the classic sense of arresting a feeling and communicating it in song.
Most people can only achieve that sort of things with words and music. Willsteed achieved it using the stuff of his life and times. And he sang. It was truly a beautiful thing to see.

Phil Graham

Theatres are normally a technical cave where numerous creatives conspire to manufacture an ephemeral truth with smoke, mirrors and a dash of bullshit.
The authenticity of John's show was spectacular in its honesty and humanity, the audience was invited to share an hour of human reflection, but not indulgence. The audience were for the most part implicit in the narrative, but also spectators in its telling.
I concur with Phil, Willsteed sang an hour-long song.
The post-modern brain-fuck of a gritty 19 year old on screen, observing his 50-something future self, singing to his present about the crash and burn of rebellious past life. (Enter Barthes Cage and Duchamp to decode).
Apparently in the show tonight John enters in a DeLorean!!!!

Michael Whelan

I really did enjoy your event at the Powerhouse – it was warm, unorthodox, informative and engaging.

Adrian Cunningham, Executive Director and State Archivist, Qld State Archives

It's Not the Heat it's the Humidity – Brisbane Powerhouse 2015

Observations about John Willsteed and his art of diseur.

On Friday 30th October 2015, I attended John Willsteed's "lecture" at the Brisbane Powerhouse at what turned out to be a most astonishing and memorable theatrical event for me; one that seized my imagination about the power of transmutative testimonial theatre.

I, too, am researching something of Brisbane's neglected, secret and hidden histories for the ARI Remix Project (remix.org.au funded by Arts Queensland and The Australia Council). This project examines the artist-run DIY impulse in the visual arts and the extensive overlaps between the visual arts and other 1980's "sectors" like popular culture, theatre, music, design, fashion, media, politics, student activism, collaborations and collectives and so on. John is one of the many like-minded Brisbane identities, collaborators and peers who traversed both art and music during the oppressive Bjelke Peterson regime.

To be perfectly honest, I had little prior knowledge of John's "lecture", nor its scope, reach or intent. I attended that evening with my artist colleague, Virginia Barratt, expecting to view a traditional art historical PowerPoint presentation designed for a 2015 style PhD about the lively and anarchic late 1970's and 1980's Brisbane music scenes in which John was an active participant.

My understanding at the time was that, like many of the broader and truer accounts of history coming to light now some thirty years after the 1987-1989 Fitzgerald Inquiry, as public memory and collective testimonial illumination is slowly recalibrating itself with judicial process, Willsteed's account would be an added overdue and consolatory antidote to

the double narratives of shame and ratbaggery manufactured by the Bjelke Peterson propaganda machine.

However, I was astonished to discover that the event I was attending was not simply a conventional dry academic lecture laced with witty consolations and addled with heavy footnotes chronicling the DIY music scene with a conventional (albeit digital not analogue) slide show but it was, more interestingly, a polished and immersive theatrical performance monologue. It was testimonial theatre, produced in the calibre of a William Yang monologue and with the verve of a Barry Kosky production.

John has clearly and perhaps unwittingly, found a compelling new form of practice in producing this “lecture,” the art of the diseur.

His natural gifts as a raconteur, his testimonies, his song lines and those shared with his contemporaries; the preceding welcome to country about genocide and south east Queensland aboriginal language groups by Bob Weatherall; the photographs and small gauge film works by artists including Paul O’Brien, Gary Warner, Merilee Bennett and Peter Fischmann; as well as the amazing tech support by Nathan Sibthorpe, all provided the audience with both a long troubled backdrop alongside a personal and shared testimonial account of the Brisbane music scene. Only this testimonial form of theatricality can provide a window to its hidden and lesser well-known exponents (bands like Pork and Zero), which are all imbued with the magic of time travel, reverie, contemplation, viscera and surreality.

This production by John, his Powerhouse crew and collaborators carried with it all the leitmotifs of multinarrative, personal recollections: inner monologue; quotations; the active sharing of unseen and private analogue resources and archives (astounding, no less); high production values; lighting, sound and music; as well as the evocative aboriginal acknowledgement of song lines past present and future. It was, for me, a most vivid event.

It’s Not the Heat it’s the Humidity was both astonishing and unexpected, just like the many memorable monologue-style events I have witnessed at Belvoir Street, The Performance Space or the Sydney Opera House during the course of the thirty years in my capacity as an arts journalist and theatre reviewer. These events were by artists reimagining their difficult

biographies in transformative ways, including William Yang, David Page, Annie Sprinkle and Noel Tovey

It was this confluence of Willsteed's personal and hidden histories embedded into the narrative of Queensland's unique, haphazard, social and political history, accompanied by archival images by the likes of O'Brien and Warner that was, for his viewer at least, memorable theatre as well as embodying the very essence of what the academy is truly about. Arguably, bringing new knowledge, fresh insights and secret, neglected or hidden histories to the knowledge base. Providing value to the overshadowed where there is none or little.

What Willsteed has foregrounded is an astounding series of fresh insights, a stirring acknowledgement by Bob Weatherall at the outset about the aboriginal genocide on country where these activities happened and the shared impulse for song lines, dance and ceremony that is timeless, never before seen documentary mages by artists Paul O' Brien, Merilee Bennett, Peter Fischmann with the gravitas of Australian image icons like Carol Jerrems, Rennie Ellis and David Moore and Gary Warner's quiet super eight archives that nuance and evocatively extend Willsteed's accounts.

It's Not the Heat it's the Humidity has graced the knowledge base with new and fresh insights, at once relational, collectively consoling and deeply personal, insights which will continue to serve both the academy and audiences well and I imagine that this "monologue" unpacking has just begun.

Willsteed too, not unlike monologue protegés like Ruth Draper and Spalding Gray who found and altered their way later on life's path, has found a new form of expression apropos to his diverse and inflected direct lived experience and innate and deft capacity for captivating storytelling. One that artfully combines, art, song, songlines, music, storytelling, knowledge, secrets, adversity and triumph emboldened by his newfound discovery of the genre of performative monologue and its bent for personal and collective transformation.

While so much of the recent shared past, and broader accounts of the truth have been neglected by both the academy and the media, the archival impulse in the era of the internet and digital communities is foregrounding forgotten accounts of direct lived

experience as never before, John Willsteed is an important protagonist in this artful paradigm shifting unfolding now in his unique voice.

Paul Andrews

LIST OF FIGURES

CREDITS

Nathan Sibthorpe was responsible for the projected elements of the show

Mail art by a variety of Brisbane scenesters

Stills from *It's Not The Heat, It's The Humidity* from video footage shot by Nicole McCuaig, Kate O'Sullivan, Mike Willmett, Chuck Alotta

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